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W.S. Gilbert

Edith A. Browne

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W. S. GILBERT

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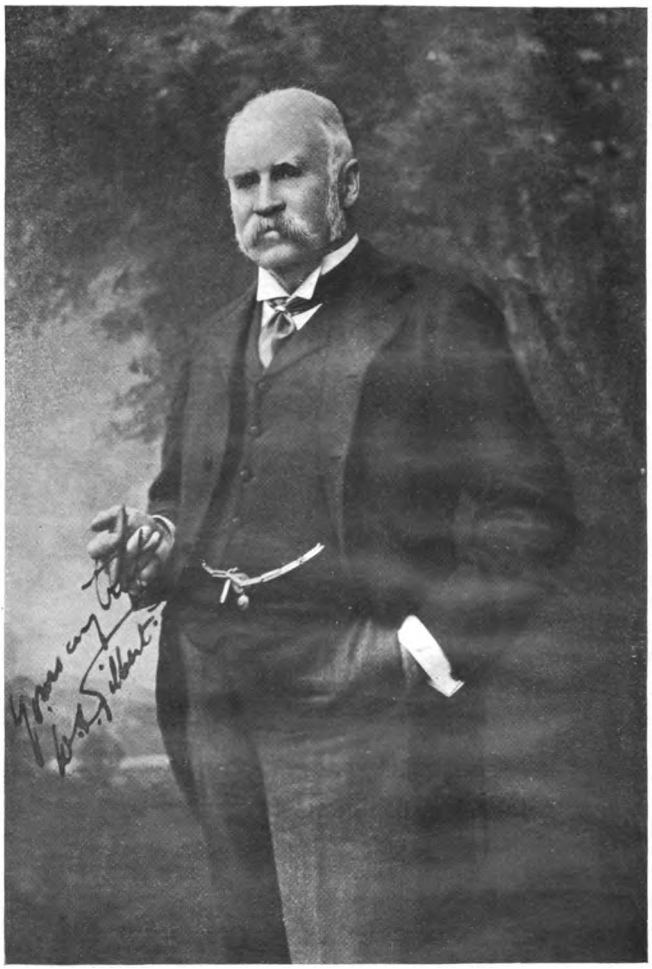

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W. S. GILBERT

BY

EDITH A. BROWNE

WITH TWENTY-THREE
ILLUSTRATIONS

LONDON : JOHN LANE, THE BODLEY HEAD
NEW YORK : JOHN LANE COMPANY. MCMVII

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AUTHOR'S NOTE

I hope that all who have directly or indirectly helped me with this biography will accept my sincere thanks for their courteous and kind assistance. I am indebted to Messrs. Macmillan & Co. for permission to quote from the text of "The Bab Ballads and Songs of a Savoyard," and to reproduce some of the illustrations originally drawn by Mr. W. S. Gilbert for that volume, to Messrs. Chatto & Windus for liberty to quote from their edition of Mr. Gilbert's Original Plays, and to Mr. Carl Hentschel, Mr. J. M. Bulloch, and Mr. J. Waters, for permission to reprint parts of the Programme of the Savoyard Celebration Dinner.

Specially would I acknowledge a very deep debt of gratitude to Mr. Gilbert, who has so generously responded to my many exacting demands on his time, memory and literary rights; in addition to giving me complete freedom to quote from his Bab Ballads, Plays, and Libretti, he has personally supplied me with all the biographical facts which I have recorded, helped with the illustrations, and read through the proofs of this book with a view to ensuring

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accuracy in historical details. I can only add that just as it is often impossible to localise and designate valuable assistance, so is it impossible adequately to acknowledge it, for which reason I hope my thanks will be better understood than they have been expressed.

EDITH A. BROWNE.

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W. S. GILBERT

CHAPTER I

THE GENESIS OF AN IMPRESSIONIST SKETCH

MY STAR

All that I know
Of a certain star,
Is, it can throw
(Like the angled spar)
Now a dart of red,
Now a dart of blue,
Till my friends have said
They would fain see, too,
My star that dartles the red and the blue!
Then it stops like a bird,—like a flower, hangs furled;
They must solace themselves with the Saturn above it.
What matter to me if their star is a world?
Mine has opened its soul to me; therefore I love it.

BROWNING.

THE name of W. S. Gilbert is so generally associated with jovial songs, merry jests, jocular stories and Sir Arthur Sullivan's tuneful music, that I seem to hear an audience of disappointed Savoy-Lovers exclaiming, "Why this discordant note? We naturally expected you to ring up the curtain on a festive scene in which we should behold our favourite jester with cap and bells, and you bring on Browning to speak a prologue that tells of a star with a *soul*. You have made a mistake—this is not the Court Theatre."

My defence will be anticipated by the many friends who have met W. S. Gilbert in the "Theatre Royal, World," and already I feel they are in sympathy with me. For the

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present, therefore, I address myself only to the right loyal and loving subjects of King William of Topsy-Turvydom. You, my fellow countrymen, know your king as humorist, social satirist, fascinating rhymer and mirth-provoking magician, and above all as the keen intellectual sportsman who shoots those venomless Gilbertian arrows which never fail to hit the target of weak human nature. A genuine interest in this sprightly jester fosters a wish to discover how far the child was "father of the man"; our excursion into the past should prove more enjoyable if the fuller identity of the man is first revealed.

Gilbert is the author not only of the libretti of that cycle of national comic operas reminiscent of his Bab Ballads and known to fame as Savoy Opera, but of numerous plays varying in treatment from farce to tragedy, and further evidence of his versatile pen is to be seen in the many whimsical drawings which bear his name or that of his double, "Bab"; he is, moreover, an expert stage-manager, and the business-like manner in which he conducts a rehearsal is characteristic of the man who answers his letters by return of post, and who, in the course of amassing a fortune by acting as honourable treasurer to the profits of his imagination, has refuted the popular fallacy that the non-existence of the business instinct is one of the necessary proofs of the existence of the artistic temperament. Facts are never very convincing evidence when they are dissociated from the crucial drama of action in which they are evolved, but embodied in this bare recital of Gilbert's achievements is part of my defence for not striking the humorous note as the key to his individuality; to do so, even by quoting one of his own best jokes, would be but meretricious artifice. Speaking quite conventionally he has done serious work, and in the unconventional sense all his work is serious, for on his own authority he has always given us of his best, however far that best may be said to fall short of the mark. Moreover, he is not a *funny* man;

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he is a very serious man, and therein lies the irresistible charm of that peculiar quality known as Gilbertian humour. The term "Gilbertian" is descriptive of a conflict between the well-balanced mind of a serious man and the exuberant spirit of his impish counterpart; the imp triumphs, but according to the terms of the treaty between the two, the serious mortal is allowed to keep his intelligence and to make believe that he does not see anything funny in the little imp's delightful nonsense. By this compact all intelligent mortals are saved the pain of watching their fellowmen obviously playing the buffoon.

Say I have proved my case inasmuch as I consider that the first impression of W. S. Gilbert to be snatched from a biography is not that of a mere jester, the sentiment of the prologue has yet to be justified; to this end I must try to bring you into touch with the personality of the man.

Even if we hold that a man's work should be judged purely on its own merits there can be little doubt that the merely human qualities of either artist or craftsman are of considerable importance to those with whom his work brings him into contact.

"Well, from what I have heard, Gilbert——"

There is no need to whisper, Gossip, it is an open secret; Gilbert mentioned it at the Banquet recently given in his honour by the O.P. Club as the outcome of a suggestion made by Mr. Carl Hentschel, and it was one of the best jokes of the evening. As he rose to reply to the toast of "The Savoy Opera," gracefully proposed by Mr. Sidney Dark, the President of the O.P. Club, the strains of "For he's a jolly good fellow" were still hovering in the air. "I may or may not be a good fellow," he began, with a muffled ring of deep emotion in his voice, "but at the present moment I am certainly not a jolly one." In a serious, heartfelt strain he went on to say how the kindly instinct that had inspired this honour to himself and his "dear old comrades of the Savoy campaigns of long ago"

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had "sunk into his soul"; he spoke of the happy days gone by and said how it rejoiced his heart to remember that during the twenty years he had been associated with the Savoy as stage-manager and producer he had never had a serious difference with any member of the company who had so faithfully served him—then glancing to left and right at old comrades whose smiling faces corroborated this sweeping statement, he quoted himself in that joco-serious, sublimely unconscious style of diction which Gilbertian humour demands, "Yet everybody says I'm such a disagreeable man!— And I can't think why!"

All imaginative people are sensitive, thick skins being mercifully reserved by Nature for those to whom the gods are less liberal with the gift of originality. To the sensitive man, one individual who speaks ill of him becomes the world, everybody; one remark wherein lurks the sting of pain will wound him so deeply as to leave a scar that cannot be obliterated by the ninety-and-nine signs and tokens of appreciation which are showered on him by friends who are slow to judge because they are quick to understand. Gilbert was the pioneer of a dramatic revolution, for the Savoy libretti are the germ of our new Drama of Ideas, and any man who has revolutionary ideals together with the ability and strength of character to carry his theories into practical effect must necessarily be an autocrat. There is no reproach implied in the title of "autocrat" when it is significant of a supremacy, which, as in the case of Gilbert, makes itself felt in such a way that all who are subject to it cheerfully obey orders with a feeling of implicit confidence in their commander; but we must be prepared to hear the word "autocrat" as applied to the best leaders in any great movement pronounced, sometimes, with a slight inflection of voice and a significant gesture that make it sound like "tyrant," and we must remember that no estimate of the complex psychology of a leader of men is worthy of consideration if it be not the outcome

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of sympathetic criticism by the man who has realised for himself what it means to be in the grip of the instinct for power.

Again, we must not forget that we have with us always a few unfortunate beings who are utterly devoid of a sense of humour. Under the stress of a guilty conscience they will quietly submit to censure, they will not flinch even at a "big, big D" provided their most trivial offences are treated with unbecoming gravity, but they draw the line at witticism as a method of rebuke. In the name of reason let us not blame anybody for drawing the line at what he cannot understand, but at the same time we may fairly put these poor humorless mortals to the credit of any man's reputation for being a "good fellow" if he is charged discount on ready wit.

Still there is the rift in the Gilbert and Sullivan lute, it will be urged, the temporary dissolution of partnership—that cannot be explained away. No, but think of the happy ending to that drama which centred around such vital interests, the final scene played on the Savoy stage before a crowded house enthusiastically calling "Authors, authors!" as the curtain fell on Utopia. A moment's pause, the curtain up once more, and Gilbert and Sullivan appeared hand in hand; Utopia had shown that the artistic partnership had been renewed, two strong men by a very simple scene made a vast concourse of human beings feel the dramatic intensity of reconciliation when character has played a part in a threatened tragedy. What that reconciliation meant to Gilbert personally may best be gathered from his own words. Speaking of the late Sir Arthur Sullivan in his speech at the Savoyard Celebration Dinner he said: "He was a composer of the highest genius, and one who, because he was a composer of the highest genius, was as modest and as unaffected as a neophyte should be, but seldom is. Gentlemen, I am not at my merriest when I think of all that he has done for me in allowing

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his genius to shed some of its lustre upon my humble name. It is a source of sincere gratification to me to reflect that the rift that parted us for a time had been completely bridged over long before his death, and that at that time the most cordial relations existed between us."

This speech, and the banquet given by the members of the O.P. Club to express their gratitude to Gilbert "for the golden memories he has given them," are destined to figure in the annals of dramatic history. On that memorable evening of December 30, 1906, Gilbert's old comrades of the Savoy gathered round him not to pay tribute to his work, for as the guests of the O.P. Club they were, of course, included in that dramatic *ensemble* to which the Club as a representative body of playgoers wished to render homage; they came from near and far to show their love for a staunch and kind-hearted friend. We may rest assured, too, that many humbler Savoyards were present in spirit on this occasion, for Gilbert was always as courteous and polite to super as to principal, always patient and painstaking as stage-manager, where one less human would have seen in nervousness nothing but stupidity, and hastily created in the cast the kind of vacancy which can be so quickly filled. Gilbert's business policy was to ensure success for everyone connected with his work, his professional policy to write like a gentleman (using the word in its modern significance), and his human policy was based on the theory that any difference between the members of a theatrical company is sufficiently marked by the difference in their salaries, for the rest they should be treated as ladies and gentlemen till they prove themselves the contrary.

Let us take a fleeting glance at Gilbert's life outside the theatrical circle. He shuns publicity, or to use his own more expressive words has a "holy horror" of it, and in his delightful country home, Grim's Dyke, Harrow

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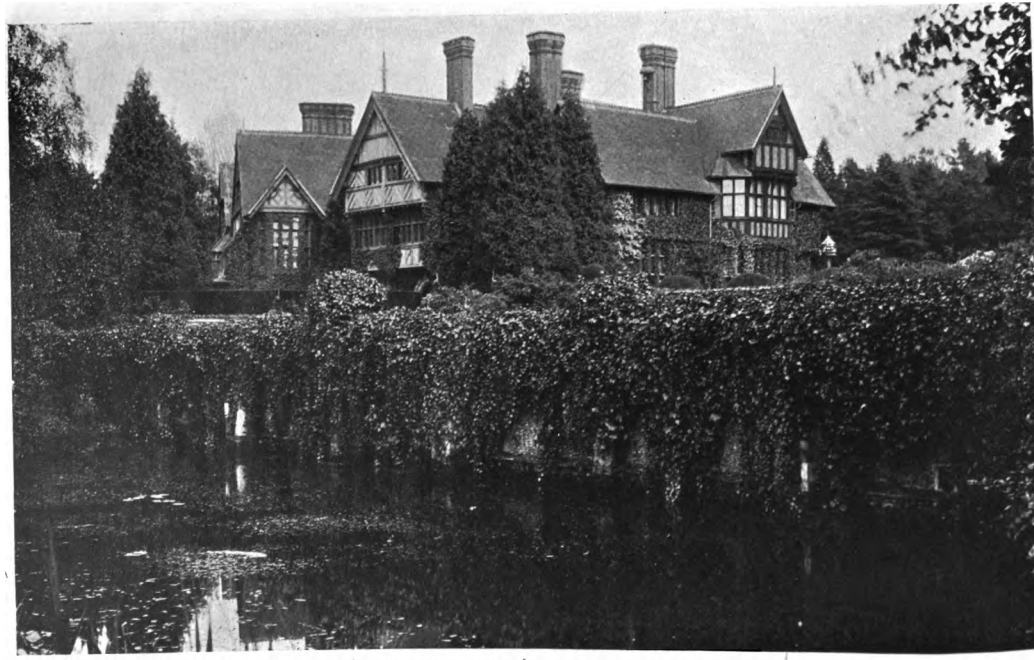

GRIM'S DYKE, MR. GILBERT'S HOUSE AT HARROW WEALD

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Weald, snugly nestling in its own grounds fringed by a wide expanse of common, he lives the life of an English squire, looking after his estate, entertaining his friends, filling the position, by no means a sinecure, of private secretary to himself, discharging the duties of a Justice of the Peace and Deputy Lieutenant for Middlesex, and devoting his leisure hours to the enthusiastic pursuit of his two hobbies, croquet and photography.

Friends and Savoy-Lovers, you who have in your mind's eye the picture you would paint of the Gilbert you treasure in your hearts, believe me I sadly realise my inability to reproduce or suggest your ideal; still I crave your indulgence for my humble efforts to make this little book the life-story of a living man rather than a treatise on dramatic astronomy. Besides, I have not had you all in my mind's eye whilst I have been focussing your hero; I have been thinking chiefly of one of you who happened by chance to see him when you were waiting to catch a train. "That's Gilbert," you remember exclaiming, as you delightedly pointed him out to the friend by your side, and you remember the reply: "*That* Gilbert?—why he doesn't look a bit like a funny man."

Only for those of you, my readers, who might with much justification have made this same reply, with maybe a slight suspicion of disappointment in your tone, have I ventured to snatch a few glimpses of W. S. Gilbert playing his part in the "Theatre Royal, World," in the hope that the impressionist picture you have meanwhile limned for yourselves will add to your interest in the story of his career. There is something wrong with the picture—it lacks the Gilbertian atmosphere? Let me give it a final touch.

"I propose calling an early chapter in my book *The Nebulous Stage*," I said to Mr. Gilbert by way of breaking the ice at my first interview with him; "and——"

"Does that refer to you or to me?" he interrupted.

Do you hear the bells?

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CHAPTER II

THE NEBULOUS STAGE

WILLIAM SCHWENCK GILBERT was born in London on November 18, 1836, at 17 Southampton Street, Strand, in the immediate vicinity of the site on which now stands the historic home of his fame, the Savoy Theatre.

In the search for any hereditary explanation of his achievements we at once find ourselves in Topsy-Turvydom. His father, William Gilbert, was a naval surgeon, who on inheriting a moderate fortune at the age of twenty-five resigned his official position, gave up the medical profession and retired into private life, from which he did not emerge till he was nearly sixty. He was born in 1804, but it was not until 1863 that he published his first novel, "Shirley Hall Asylum," in which semi-metaphysical and semi-medical knowledge largely entered into the *raison d'être* of the story. In the advanced literary circle of his day the book attracted considerable attention, and Gilbert Senior continued to add to his reputation by the publication of many other specialised novels with a scientific bearing on questions of philanthropy, metaphysics, and temperance, together with the issue of a popular life of Lucrezia Borgia in which he vigorously championed that famous toy of mediæval politics, on the authority of documents discovered in the library of Florence. Here we are confronted by a curious freak of heredity; when the father began his literary career the

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son had already won a considerable literary reputation; when Gilbert Senior started to write "Shirley Hall Asylum," Gilbert Junior was twenty-seven years old, and was known to the world as the promising young author of the "Bab Ballads." The son was actually the incentive from without which spurred into activity the innate but dormant literary talent of the father.

"Yes, I think the little success which had attended my humble efforts certainly influenced my father," Gilbert admitted when I questioned him on this point; "you see," he added, with the suspicion of a smile, "my father never had an exaggerated idea of my abilities; he thought if I could write, anybody could, and forthwith he began to do so."

Nevertheless, Gilbert would appear to be a topsy-turvy example of inherited literary tendencies, and he himself gratefully acknowledges his debt to his father for any natural bent for literature. There is, however, no hereditary explanation of his dramatic achievements, unless we wander out of bounds and allow fancy to indulge in speculative psychology that suggests a scientific theory of desires, which may so influence one generation as to find fulfilment in the next. Gilbert's father had a persistent wish to write plays; those that he worked out on paper were of a model in which the heroine makes her *début* in the first act and does not appear again till the last scene, the interest in her being theoretically maintained during her lengthy absence by sundry references in the dialogue. These plays were never heard of outside the family circle, and their author's sole consolation was the production at the Princess' Theatre of his translation in verse of *Lucia di Lammermoor*. In common parlance, therefore, W. S. Gilbert's dramatic instinct seems to be a gift from the gods.

Gilbert's earliest recollections date back to the time when he was two years old. "Bab" who was making the Grand Tour with his parents, and was then in Naples, had

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been sent out for a walk with his nurse; presently she was accosted by two men who said that the English gentleman had sent them for the baby. In simple faith she handed her little charge over to them, and they went their way—Gilbert had been stolen by brigands! Blame not the nurse too severely, think of *The Pirates of Penzance*, and remember that she was living in the days when the education of the masses was but a dream, and when railways being still in their infancy even in England, "*the* English gentleman" would be a comparatively accurate description of Gilbert Senior in Naples. A small detachment of carabinieri, armed with £25, was quickly despatched to the mountains and the little hero of this adventure was safely restored to his parents. Gilbert distinctly remembers riding in front of a man on an animal through what seemed to be a cutting with steep banks on either side; in later days, when he was again in Naples, he recognised in the Via Posilippo the scene which had impressed itself on his infant memory.

In due course Gilbert was sent to Great Ealing school, where he speedily won the reputation of being a clever, bright boy who was extremely lazy. It was soon discovered, however, that he could work so quickly that this natural tendency to idleness was no handicap to his abilities. Besides, it was clear he was no ordinary loafer; true, he was never in the mood for routine lessons, but there was one mood which haunted the boy persistently and could be relied on to so assert itself at intervals that there was no fear of his being outdistanced by his more plodding schoolfellows. He had an instinctive horror of being left behind, and spurred into activity by a healthy pride he would, by an easy effort generally made in the last moments of the term, catch up with the top boys of his class. But there was one lesson which he never neglected, one task into which he could throw himself wholeheartedly without being goaded on by character; this was

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the weekly translation into verse of a set portion of the classics, and he steadily won fame and prizes for his English versification of Horace, Aristophanes, Homer, Virgil, and their like.

In one respect Gilbert was a very ordinary boy, for the happiest part of his schooldays was the time when he was not at school. In his leisure hours—and they must have been many, seeing that he was even more favoured than the schoolboy whose conscience is never haunted by "the ghost of his Cæsar unprepared"—he was free to follow his own inclinations; his hobbies were dreaming, drawing, desultory reading, and the hero-worship of everything and everybody connected with the stage. The last-mentioned pursuit is responsible for an incident and an escapade which might belong to any boy's story, but which are particularly interesting as they happen to be reminiscent of Gilbert's early youth. As a boy of thirteen he was walking down the Strand one day when he happened to see Barry, the famous clown. Fascinated by Barry's appearance in plain clothes, Gilbert started to dog his footsteps, trying to make up his mind to ask the time for the mere pleasure of speaking to the clown. On went Barry, on followed Gilbert, now along the Strand, now doubling to the right into Wellington Street, now crossing Waterloo Bridge, till at last, just when the boy had summoned up all his courage to make one mighty effort to murmur "Please would you tell me the time?" Barry turned—into a public-house! But Gilbert was not to be disillusioned by this momentary disappointment. He still continued to be a reverential hero-worshipper of his theatrical idols, and even began to write plays, which were acted by his schoolfellows. Foreshadowing the future, the young author constituted himself stage-manager and scenic artist to these early dramatic efforts, and in one of them, a melodrama called *Guy Fawkes*, he played the principal part. At the age of fifteen this theatrical bias led him into a more

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ambitious venture; enraptured with a performance of *The Corsican Brothers* at the Princess' Theatre, then under the management of Charles Kean, he packed up a few clothes in a handbag, and actually succeeded in interviewing Kean with a view to going on the stage. It was a very elated stripling who received the message that Kean would see him in his room, but once face to face with the great actor, all the boy's courage forsook him.

"So you would like to go on the stage?" said Kean.

"Yes," murmured Master Gilbert, trembling in every limb.

"What's your name?"

The boy's imagination failed him at a critical moment in his life. "Gilbert," he replied, seeking refuge in the truth.

"Gilbert—Gilbert," reiterated Kean, "are you the son of my old friend William Gilbert?"

"Y–yes," stammered the boy, and he was promptly sent home to his father.

By intermittent spurts of easy hardwork Gilbert became head boy at Great Ealing school. At the age of sixteen he went to King's College, and the time was fast approaching the eve of his departure for Oxford, when many a father's peaceful plans for his son were suddenly reversed by the outbreak of the Crimean War. For nearly forty years English fighting blood had been comparatively quiescent and to the rising generation of 1853 Waterloo seemed to have closed the door on the alluring possibilities of fighting for their country in a momentous European conflict. But in the early days of 1854 the broad military path to glory was suddenly opened up by our declaration of war against Russia; martial enthusiasm spread like wildfire over the country the moment it was rekindled, and young England began to dream once more of being a Wellington instead of a Stephenson, Cobden or Charles Kean. In the grip of the fighting spirit Gilbert determined to sacrifice his College life and join the Army. In coming to this decision

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he met with little opposition, for there seemed good reason to believe that he would be able to realise his newly awakened ambition to be a Horse Gunner. The Government, hard pressed for officers and faced with the disconcerting evidence that there was a limit to the demand it could make on military-college cadets, was offering a number of direct commissions to men who could pass a stiff qualifying examination. Gilbert began to work with various crammers for one of these commissions; he read hard for eighteen months, when the War came to an end, and the examinations were forthwith postponed for a year. At the probable date of the next examination he would not have been able to comply with the age-limit regulations for candidates, so he abandoned the idea of a military career, and within a short time obtained a clerkship in the Privy Council Office.

In a Government office Gilbert was a failure; he found it quite impossible to adapt his personality to a system which expects every obedient servant to do his specific duty from 10 A.M. to 4 P.M. daily. "I was one of the worst bargains any Government ever made," is his official report on himself, but he is a brilliant example of the necessity for keeping a watchful eye on all bad clerks. To the personally disinterested supervisor doing duty for the common fund of success, the way in which the bad clerk uses leisure moments is of far greater importance than the way he misuses office hours. During his spare time Gilbert devised plans for breaking loose from the shackles of red tape; in justice to the many Civil Servants who have done so much to render the mechanism of the Service more effective by the application of humane power, it must be remarked that resignation is not the one and only way of bursting red tape bonds, but resignation is certainly the only loophole of escape for the man who can more easily shake off his nationality than shake off his moods. Gilbert spent five years in the infernal regions of routine, but he

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did not sit down and bewail his fortune; never for a moment did he stop scheming till he fixed on a definite plan of campaign for gaining his freedom.

Under the influence of social intercourse with the many literary and theatrical friends who frequented his father's house, his bias for the stage naturally entered largely into his ambitions, but to his modest disposition such dreams seemed destined ever to remain castles in the air, and he was searching for a practical exit from office life. A strong logical turn of mind attracted him to the Bar; with his eye on the Woolsack he went back to King's College to study for a degree when his official day's work was finished. Finding he still had some spare time at his disposal he again turned his attention to soldiering—this time only as a hobby—and at the age of twenty-two he secured a commission in the Militia. He took his B.A. degree at the London University, and about the same time he had the good fortune to receive a gift of £400. He immediately resigned the clerkship that had simultaneously irked and stimulated him, and proceeded to invest his newly acquired capital in the judicial speculation, with the result that in 1864, at the age of twenty-eight, he was called to the Bar. This "call" was practically speaking the only return the profession ever made for the £400 which he so carefully planned out—£100 for the privilege of being a student at the Inner Temple, £100 to enable him to be a pupil in the chambers of the late Judge Watkin Wilkins, who was then a barrister, the third £100 to pay his fee of admission to the Bar, and the remaining £100 to set himself up in chambers in Clement's Inn. For four years he practised; the number of his briefs averaged five per annum, the number of his fees was considerably under that average, and this in spite of the fact that the first opportunity of calling a judge "Your wushup" was afforded him by a Frenchman who manifested his warm appreciation of his young counsel's oratorical powers by throwing his

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MR. GILBERT AS AN OFFICER IN THE 3RD BATTALION GORDON HIGHLANDERS

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arms round Gilbert's neck and kissing him in open court. But even this warm-hearted Frenchman forgot to pay Gilbert his fee, and the public display of affection in connection with his maiden brief did not increase his popularity to the extent of bringing him a case in which he could win either fame or a substantial cheque. Day by day he waited in vain for some "interesting client, victim of a heartless wile," but she never came, neither did the "traitor all defiant," who would have been equally welcome; not even an enterprising burglar was enterprising enough to rely on the new junior's orations, even though he might have been restored "to his friends and relations" for a very small consideration, had he been wise in his generation. At last it became clear that the Bar had given Gilbert up; meanwhile he had established a literary reputation as the author of the "Bab Ballads," and had written several farces, which had been so successfully produced that they augured well for a dramatic career. But even though the future looked bright enough to the man who had achieved so much at the age of thirty-two, yet it was with a feeling of disappointment that Gilbert accepted the verdict of the profession to which he would fain have devoted his life. He had, and still has, a strong affection for the Bar and its surroundings; even now he thinks that barristers are, with the exception of the better class of artists, the most attractive companions.

What was the incentive which first induced Gilbert to wield the author's pen? Simply the very ordinary desire of the great majority—he wanted to supplement his income. He is doggedly frank on this point, and will not allow that his ambition soared beyond a cheque when he dropped his first manuscript into the post. Indeed, he is so overanxious not to be taken for a man with a mission that he may be relied on to spare no effort to convince any interviewer who engages him in conversation that his sole object in life was to be a successful man. I have already related

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how within a few seconds after he had welcomed me to Grim's Dyke he donned the jester's cap; for fully an hour after that he systematically worked hard to persuade me that if I was going to write his biography in at all a critical way I must disabuse my mind of any theory which conceived him as a man with ideals; he dexterously cut away the ground that lay beneath the questions I put to him, shaped his answers in the form of questions whereby he interviewed me and discovered, amongst other things, that I belong to the Stage Society, banteringly suggested that I must surely be feeling what a heathen he was, and generally indulged his sense of humour quite good-naturedly at my expense. He seemed thoroughly to enjoy his own idea of himself as a heathen, and, as he enlarged on it, moment by moment he grew more witty, moment by moment I felt myself growing more serious and more dull, as he apparently scoffed into nothingness all my cherished ideas of him which were to form the basis of the biography I was to write. Was Gilbert just what Gilbert would have me believe him to be? I was not quite convinced; I remembered his three serious plays, but hesitated to refer to them, knowing that they had not brought him the recognition he had hoped for. But I also remembered one of the "Bab Ballads," a wholly serious, artistic little human-nature poem, which is a particular favourite of mine, and I determined to play this as my trump card; if I failed, then I would accept Gilbert at his own estimate as merely a jester, and conclude that it was only in a few stray moods that he had written in a serious vein. The "heathen" had just made an excellent joke, when suddenly I said in a nonchalant tone, "By the way, there is one of the 'Bab Ballads' which is conspicuously different from the others, and it's rather a favourite of mine—do you mind telling me how it was you happened to write 'At a Pantomime'?"

Gilbert's expression changed in a twinkling; bending forward in his chair he exclaimed earnestly, even somewhat

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excitedly, "'At a Pantomime'! Why that's one of the best things I ever wrote—and you're the first person who has ever singled it out. I can do something more than wear the cap and bells." It was one of the most triumphant moments in my life when he answered me thus; I had taken the great humorist off his guard, and from that moment onwards whenever we talked together he was not the humorist to me, but the man who took me into his confidence as a friend privileged to look behind the veil with which we all cover up our dearest joys and our bitterest sorrows.

I have not told this little story with any idea of self-glorification; my only object has been to show that when Gilbert asserts that his one and only idea in entering on a literary career was to make money there is much behind that statement that we must fill in for ourselves, much on which his early life, his failures as well as his successes, his artistic sense, his sense of humour, and his abhorrence of any suspicion of affectation throw valuable light. With these reservations, then, we may take him at his word—as a clerk in the Privy Council Office he looked around for some means of supplementing his income. What stock-in-trade had he by which there was any chance of making a promiscuous living? A keen ear for rhythm, distant memories of praise lavished on him for verses written in schooldays, a more vivid recollection of contributions to the *King's College Magazine*, to which the late Canon Ainger was a contributor at the same time, and an entirely self-taught facility for drawing which had enabled him to relieve the monotony of many a weary day in the Privy Council Office by sketching little grotesques to pacify his rebellious imagination—nothing much in the way of capital here, he thought, as he introspectively reviewed his possibilities. He lacked confidence, but he lacked money, too, and fortunately that pride which had made the schoolboy so determined not to be left behind by his companions still

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spurred on the man. With a view to leaving no step unturned to improve his position, Gilbert thought to combine his versifying facility with his hobgoblin art. He despatched his first manuscript, a long quasi-humorous poem, by name "Satisfied Isaiah Jones," to a paper called *Once a Week;* it came back, but it does not haunt the spectral regions of journalism as a ghost of "copy declined with thanks"; it hovers around in editorial space to encourage the ambitious *littérateur* by showing that editors are not as black as they are painted by unsuccessful journalists. "The editor of *Once a Week* regrets that he cannot use the enclosed clever and amusing poem owing to its length"; such were the contents of the letter with which "Satisfied Isaiah Jones" was returned to its author, and remembering that the columns of a periodical have not an elastic quality we may spare a word of congratulation to Gilbert's first critic in the open field of literary competition. To hear Gilbert speak of his delight on receiving this letter is to realise what it meant to him in the way of encouragement. With little delay he sent off his next effort to *Fun* and this second manuscript was promptly accepted. Its publication in 1862 may well be considered to mark the dawn of the Gilbertian star, for *Fun* followed it up with the publication of the "Bab Ballads," which in spirit, and often in the poetical flesh of their characters, are the germ of Savoy Opera.

In the interval between the serial publication of the "Bab Ballads," and the momentous collaboration with Sir Arthur Sullivan, Gilbert made many varied and sincere attempts to shine within the horizon of the dramatic world; whether or not that world may be said to be peopled with generations in whose changing ideals past memories are lost, we may judge when we review that intermediary work; certain it is that the Savoy Operas, which are the grown-up "Bab Ballads," have won for both author and composer a place among the fixed stars in the dramatic firmament. In

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those operas we may re-read the life-story of Gilbert as told by himself and that mischievous little sprite who fought the serious man for nearly thirty years, and in a moment of victory slipped a sceptre into his one hand, as with the other he doffed the barrister's wig and donned the jester's cap.

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CHAPTER III

THE BAB BALLADS

GILBERT entered on his journalistic career under the *nom de plume* of "Bab," which, as an abbreviated form of "baby," had been his pet name in childhood's days. Casting about for a pseudonym with which to veil his identity, he suddenly bethought him of the name to which he had answered in the earliest years of his life, and forthwith adopted it in his journalistic infancy. Bab's first experience of *Fun* was a profitable surprise; it came in the guise of a stranger who, having introduced himself as a member of the staff, explained that Mr. H. J. Byron, the editor, would be glad if Bab would contribute to that periodical a column of letterpress and a half-page block weekly for the term of his natural life.

"But that little thing I sent you in the other day is all I can do," replied Bab. However, by dint of persuasion he was induced to try again on the same lines as he had written and illustrated his first contribution; the result gave him sufficient confidence to accept the invitation to join the staff of *Fun*, to whose readers "Bab" soon became a name to conjure with. Many of his contributions were afterwards collected and published in book form, but subsequently their author disinherited a great number of them and issued a selection in a little volume entitled "Fifty Bab Ballads, Much Sound and Little Sense," to which W. S. Gilbert contributed a preface that runs as follows:

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The "Bab Ballads" appeared originally in the columns of *Fun*, when that periodical was under the editorship of the late Tom Hood. They were subsequently republished in two volumes, one called "The Bab Ballads," the other "More Bab Ballads." The period during which they were written extended over some three or four years; many, however, were composed hastily, and under the discomforting necessity of having to turn out a quantity of lively verse by a certain day in every week. As it seemed to me (and to others) that the volumes were disfigured by the presence of these hastily written impostors, I thought it better to withdraw from both volumes such Ballads as seemed to show evidence of carelessness or undue haste, and to publish the remainder in the compact form under which they are now presented to the reader.

Finally, however, the "Bab Ballads" were all reprinted and published in one volume, together with "Songs of a Savoyard," these latter being a selection of the most popular songs and ballads in the Savoy Operas. To this edition, which is still the current one, although it has passed through many reprints, Gilbert has contributed the following explanatory preface:

About thirty years since, several of the "Bab Ballads" (most of which had appeared, from time to time, in the pages of *Fun*) were collected by me and published. This volume passed through several editions, and, in due course, was followed by a second series under the title of "More Bab Ballads," which achieved a popularity equal to that of its predecessor. Subsequently, excerpts were made from these two volumes, and under the title of "Fifty Bab Ballads" had a very considerable sale; but I soon discovered that in making the selection for this volume I had discarded certain Ballads that were greater favourites with my readers than with me. Nevertheless this issue was followed by many editions, English and American, of "Bab Ballads," "More Bab Ballads," and "Fifty Bab Ballads," to the no little bewilderment of such of the public as had been good enough to concern themselves with my verses. So it became desirable (for our own private ends) that this confusion should be definitely cleared up; and thus it came to pass that a reissue of the two earlier collections, in one volume, was decided upon ["The Bab Ballads, with which are included Songs of a Savoyard"—*Macmillan*].

Imagine for the moment that you are living in the mid-Victorian age, and that you know nothing whatever about

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Bab. You pick up the current number of *Fun*, read a few lines and smile, hastily turn the pages to take a first glance at the contents, laugh over the illustrations, jot down in your memory a funny little story that may come in useful on a future occasion, and already well-nigh acclimatised to the atmosphere of merriment, you tell yourself how absurd it was to think only this morning that life is not worth living; so you seriously settle down to enjoy your paper, and here is your fare:

THE YARN OF THE *NANCY BELL*.*

'Twas on the shores that round our coast
From Deal to Ramsgate span,
That I found alone on a piece of stone
An elderly naval man.

His hair was weedy, his beard was long,
And weedy and long was he,
And I heard that wight on the shore recite,
In a singular minor key:

"Oh, I am a cook and a captain bold,
And the mate of the *Nancy* brig,
And a bo'sun tight, and a midshipmite,
And the crew of the captain's gig."

And he shook his fists and he tore his hair,
Till I really felt afraid,
For I couldn't help thinking the man had been drinking,
And so I simply said:

"Oh, elderly man, it's little I know
Of the duties of men of the sea,
And I'll eat my hand if I understand
How you can possibly be

"At once a cook, and a captain bold,
And the mate of the *Nancy* brig,
And a bo'sun tight, and a midshipmite,
And the crew of the captain's gig."

Then he gave a hitch to his trousers, which
Is a trick all seamen larn,
And having got rid of a thumping quid,
He spun this pitiful yarn:

* "The Bab Ballads and Songs of a Savoyard." Macmillan.

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ILLUSTRATION TO "THE YARN OF THE *NANCY BELL*"

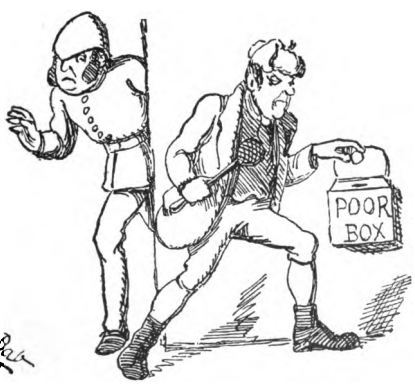

ILLUSTRATION TO "MY DREAM"

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" 'Twas in the good ship *Nancy Bell*
That we sailed to the Indian Sea,
And there on a reef we come to grief,
Which has often occurred to me.

" And pretty nigh all the crew was drowned
(There was seventy-seven o' soul),
And only ten of the *Nancy's* men
Said 'Here!' to the muster-roll.

" There was me and the cook and the captain bold,
And the mate of the *Nancy* brig,
And the bo'sun tight, and a midshipmite,
And the crew of the captain's gig.

" For a month we'd neither wittles nor drink,
Till a-hungry we did feel,
So we drawed a lot, and, accordin' shot
The captain for our meal.

" The next lot fell to the *Nancy's* mate,
And a delicate dish he made;
Then our appetite with the midshipmite
We seven survivors stayed.

" And then we murdered the bo'sun tight,
And he much resembled pig;
Then we wittled free, did the cook and me,
On the crew of the captain's gig.

" Then only the cook and me was left,
And the delicate question, 'Which
Of us two goes to the kettle?' arose,
And we argued it out as sich.

" For I loved that cook as a brother, I did,
And the cook he worshipped me;
But we'd both be blowed if we'd either be stowed
In the other chap's hold, you see.

" 'I'll be eat if you dines off me,' says Tom:
'Yes, that,' says I, 'you'll be,—
I'm boiled if I die, my friend,' quoth I;
And 'Exactly so,' quoth he.

" Says he, 'Dear James, to murder me
Were a foolish thing to do,
For don't you see that you can't cook *me*,
While I can—and will—cook *you*!'

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"So he boils the water, and takes the salt
And the pepper in portions true
(Which he never forgot), and some chopped shalot,
And some sage and parsley too.

"'Come here,' says he, with a proper pride,
Which his smiling features tell,
'T'will soothing be if I let you see
How extremely nice you'll smell.'

"And he stirred it round and round and round,
And he sniffed at the foaming froth;
When I ups with his heels, and smothers his squeals
In the scum of the boiling broth.

"And I eat that cook in a week or less,
And—as I eating be
The last of his chops, why, I almost drops,
For a wessel in sight I see!

* * * * *

"And I never grin, and I never smile,
And I never larf nor play,
But I sit and croak, and a single joke
I have—which is to say:

"'Oh, I am a cook and a captain bold,
And the mate of the *Nancy* brig,
And a bo'sun tight, *and* a midshipmite,
And the crew of the captain's gig!'"

Blessed with a sense of humour that is too healthy to be impaired by "isms," you look to see who has been spinning this vivid yarn of the conscience-stricken cannibal who cannot help seeing a joke; the author's name is "Bab," you find, and the first question you will ask the very next person you meet will be "Do you know who Bab is?"

This was the question that was asked on all sides when "The Yarn of the Nancy Bell" appeared in *Fun*. That yarn was responsible for awakening the spontaneous "Who's who" curiosity which is the first sign of popularity, and Bab soon realised that he had placed himself in the exacting position of having to live up to a reputation. We have ample evidence that he had the means at his disposal not only to maintain that position, but to enhance his popularity, although the singular minor key in which

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the elderly naval man spins his yarn is the keynote of the singular humour which is so original that we have had to coin the adjective "Gilbertian" to describe it.

The "Bab Ballads" naturally fall into two sections: in the one we find the germ of Savoy Opera, in the other traces of an artistic temperament seeking to express its interpretation of life.

Turning our attention first to the ballads which are in the Gilbertian strain, we find in them not only the spirit but much of the substance of Savoy Opera. Characters and plots which were afterwards to develop in the more spacious regions of comic opera, and witticisms destined to be transplanted and so gain in point that they have passed into everyday phraseology, meet us at every turn. Little Buttercup, who tells "The Bumboat Woman's Story," is rejuvenated in *H.M.S. Pinafore.* Shrivelled with age in the ballads she recalls the days of her youth:

A bumboat woman was I, and I faithfully served the ships
With apples and cakes, and fowls, and beer, and halfpenny dips,
And beef for the generous mess, where the officers dine at nights,
And fine fresh peppermint drops for the rollicking midshipmites.*

Plying her trade, she boards *H.M.S. Pinafore,* singing merrily:

Hail, men-o'-war's men—safeguards of your nation,
Here is an end, at last, of all privation;
You've got your pay—spare all you can afford
To welcome Little Buttercup on board.

For I'm called Little Buttercup, dear Little Buttercup,
Though I could never tell why,
But still I'm called Buttercup, poor Little Buttercup,
Sweet Little Buttercup, I.
I've snuff, and tobaccy, and excellent jacky;
I've scissors, and watches, and knives;
I've ribbons and laces to set off the faces
Of pretty young sweethearts and wives.
I've treacle and toffee and excellent coffee,
Soft tommy and succulent chops;
I've chickens and conies and pretty polonies,
And excellent peppermint drops.

* "The Bab Ballads and Songs of a Savoyard." Macmillan.

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Then buy of your Buttercup—dear Little Buttercup,
Sailors should never be shy;
So buy of your Buttercup—poor Little Buttercup,
Come, of your Buttercup buy!

It is Little Buttercup, too, who in her old age gives us a peep at the well-bred crew of the *Hot Cross Bun*—

When Jack Tars meet, they meet with a "Messmate, ho! What cheer?"
But here, on the *Hot Cross Bun*, it was "How do you do, my dear?"
When Jack Tars growl, I believe they growl with a big, big D.—
But the strongest oath of the *Hot Cross Buns* was a mild "Dear me!"

Yet, though they were all well bred, you could scarcely call them slick:
Whenever a sea was on, they were all extremely sick;
And whenever the weather was calm, and the wind was light and fair,
They spent more time than a sailor should on his back back hair.*

Obviously *H.M.S. Pinafore* belonged to the same exclusive Navy as her twin-sister the *Hot Cross Bun*, for we feel certain that the Rt. Hon. Sir Joseph Porter, K.C.B., who held that "on the seas, the expression 'if you please,' a particularly gentlemanly tone implants," must have been First Lord of a most aristocratic Admiralty, yet did he not "seek the seclusion that a cabin grants," whenever a breeze sprang up? Moreover, although we are introduced to an old bumboat woman in the Ballads, here is Captain Corcoran's evidence to prove that Bab was only anticipating her pleasant recollections of younger days passed in the company of *H.M.S. Pinafore's* sea-faring brethren:

Captain Corcoran. I am the Captain of the *Pinafore!*
Crew. And a right good captain, too!
Capt. You're very, very good,
And be it understood
I command a right good crew.

* "The Bab Ballads and Songs of a Savoyard." Macmillan.

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ILLUSTRATION TO "THE BUMBOAT WOMAN'S STORY"

ILLUSTRATION TO "THE BUMBOAT WOMAN'S STORY"

FRONTISPIECE, "BAB BALLADS AND SONGS OF A SAVOYARD"

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All. We're very, very good,
And be it understood
He commands a right good crew.
Capt. Though related to a peer,
I can hand, reef, and steer,
And ship a selvagee;
I am never known to quail
At the fury of a gale,
And I'm never, never sick at sea!
All. What, never?
Capt. No, never!
All. What, *never?*
Capt. Hardly ever!
All. He's hardly ever sick at sea!
Then give three cheers, and one cheer more,
For the hardy Captain of the *Pinafore!*

Capt. I do my best to satisfy you all—
All. And with you we're quite content.
Capt. You're exceedingly polite,
And I think it only right
To return the compliment.
All. We're exceedingly polite,
And he thinks it only right
To return the compliment.
Capt. Bad language or abuse,
I never, never use,
Whatever the emergency;
Though "Bother it," I may
Occasionally say,
I never use a big, big D—
All. What, never?
Capt. No, never!
All. What, *never?*
Capt. Hardly ever!
All. Hardly ever swears a big, big D—
Then give three cheers, and one cheer more,
For the well-bred Captain of the *Pinafore!*

Again we meet in the Bab Ballads "The Rival Curates," Mr. Clayton Hooper of Spiffton-extra-Sooper and the Reverend Hopley Porter of Assesmilk-cum-Worter. To all appearances each is mildly striving to win the palm for being the mildest curate in the neighbourhood but—moralising being happily so foreign to Bab's philosophy, it would be heresy to quote even from the "Psalm of Life." Suffice to recall that when the Rev. C.

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Hooper despatches his sexton and his beadle to Assesmilk-cum-Worter with the clerical command to duly assassinate the Rev. Hopley Porter unless he will consent to play croquet, smoke, dance and gaily retire from the "mild" competition, that reverend gent admits that he has been longing for years for an excuse to be himself, only now that an excuse for making the change has come he adds: "I do it on compulsion!!!"

In "The Rival Curates" we see the prototypes of Reginald Bunthorne and Archibald Grosvenor, the rival poets in *Patience*. Then, too, we have in the Ballads "The Fairy Curate," offspring of a "fairy light and airy" and a mortal attorney, who reappears as Strephon in *Iolanthe*, and the story of "The Baby's Vengeance," which turns on two infants exchanging their luck in the cradle lottery, the pivot of the plots of *H.M.S. Pinafore* and *The Gondoliers*.

But apart from the material properties of the Bab Ballads which were assimilated by the Savoy Operas we find in these ballads that sprightly wit allied with the keen intellectual observation, unprejudiced outlook, and ethical but unmoralising tendency which combine to form the basis of Gilbert's appeal. Not for one moment would I claim for all Bab's humorous ballads these indicative qualities; some of them are undoubtedly just the light but always bright and entertaining nonsense rhymes of a first-rate doggerel bard, but many have the added charm of uncommon sense, witness "Bob Polter" dealing with the temperance question, "Mister William" suggestive of prison reform, "Etiquette" satirising the social convention of introduction as the bedrock of friendship, and many others, the most characteristic of the whole series being

MY DREAM.*

The other night, from cares exempt,
I slept—and what d'you think I dreamt?
I dreamt that somehow I had come
To dwell in Topsy-Turvydom—

* "The Bab Ballads and Songs of a Savoyard." Macmillan.

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Where vice is virtue—virtue, vice :
Where nice is nasty—nasty, nice :
Where right is wrong and wrong is right,
Where white is black and black is white.

Where babies, much to their surprise,
Are born astonishingly wise ;
With every Science on their lips,
And Art at all their finger-tips.

For, as their nurses dandle them
They crow binomial theorem,
With views (it seems absurd to us)
On differential calculus.

But though a babe, as I have said,
Is born with learning in his head,
He must forget it, if he can,
Before he calls himself a man.

For that which we call folly here,
Is wisdom in that favoured sphere ;
The wisdom we so highly prize
Is blatant folly in their eyes.

A boy, if he would push his way,
Must learn some nonsense every day ;
And cut, to carry out this view,
His wisdom teeth and wisdom too.

Historians burn their midnight oils,
Intent on giant-killers' toils ;
And sages close their aged eyes
To other sages' lullabies.

Our magistrates, in duty bound,
Commit all robbers who are found ;
But there the beaks (so people said)
Commit all robberies instead.

Our judges, pure and wise in tone,
Know crime from theory alone,
And glean the motives of a thief
From books and popular belief.

But there, a judge who wants to prime
His mind with true ideas of crime,
Derives them from the common sense
Of practical experience.

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Policemen march all folks away
Who practise virtue every day—
Of course, I mean to say, you know,
What we call virtue here below.

For only scoundrels dare to do
What we consider just and true,
And only good men do, in fact,
What we should think a dirty act.

But strangest of these social twirls,
The girls are boys—the boys are girls!
The men are women, too—but then,
Per contra, women all are men.

To one who to tradition clings
This seems an awkward state of things,
But if to think it out you try,
It doesn't really signify.

With them, as surely as can be,
A sailor should be sick at sea,
And not a passenger may sail
Who cannot smoke right through a gale.

A soldier (save by rarest luck)
Is always shot for showing pluck
(That is, if others can be found
With pluck enough to fire a round).

"How strange!" I said to one I saw;
"You quite upset our every law.
However can you get along
So systematically wrong?"

"Dear me!" my mad informant said,
"Have you no eyes within your head?
You sneer when you your hat should doff:
Why, we begin where you leave off!

"Your wisest men are very far
Less learned than our babies are!"
I mused awhile—and then, oh me!
I framed this brilliant repartee:

"Although your babes are wiser far
Than our most valued sages are,
Your sages, with their toys and cots,
Are duller than our idiots!"

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But this remark, I grieve to state,
Came just a little bit too late,
For as I framed it in my head,
I woke and found myself in bed.

Still I could wish that, 'stead of here,
My lot were in that favoured sphere!—
Where greatest fools bear off the bell
I ought to do extremely well.

In striking contrast to these mirth-provoking Ballads, standing apart as quite distinct even from those in which a more or less serious subject is humorously treated, we find three ballads in which an apparently mirthful subject is handled with the universal touch of artistic comprehension. All three deal with actors in a pantomime, a super, a fairy, and Father Christmas. In "The Pantomime Super to his Mask" the super reviles the mask, addressing it as "Vast empty shell! Impertinent, preposterous abortion!" He curses it as the beast that has destroyed his heaven-born identity, in brutal passion he is half-tempted to smash to atoms the senseless face with its inane set smile, in tones of blatant superiority he reviles the dull concavity to which he has been the brain, doomed to counsel the human race to scorn himself as the embodiment of its facial expression of depravity, monstrosity and ferocity. But the pantomime has run its course, now he is free to thrust aside the hateful mask, and thus he bids it farewell:

'Tis time to toll
Thy knell, and that of follies pantomimical:
A nine weeks' run
And thou hast done
All thou canst do to make thyself inimical.
Adieu, embodiment of all inanity!
Excellent type of simpering insanity!
Unwieldy, clumsy nightmare of humanity!
Freed is thy soul! *

Ere the super has time to strut forth to his vaunted freedom the mask replies:

* "The Bab Ballads and Songs of a Savoyard." Macmillan.

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Oh! master mine,
Look thou within thee, ere again ill-using me.
Art thou aware
Of nothing there
Which might abuse thee, as thou art abusing me?
A brain that mourns *thine* unredeemed rascality?
A soul that weeps at *thy* threadbare morality?
Both grieving that *their* individuality
Is merged in thine? *

In the heart of this response we find one of Nature's tragedies; the super is no mummer, for as the fool and knave of pantomime he is symbolic of himself, of all that there is to show for a predestined *man!*

"Only a Dancing Girl," half-clothed in the tawdry tinsel of an artificial fairy, is an unromantic lie:

No airy fairy she,
As she hangs in arsenic green
From a highly impossible tree
In a highly impossible scene
(Herself not over-clean).

* * * * *

But change her gold and green
For a coarse merino gown,
And see her upon the scene
Of her home, when coaxing down
Her drunken father's frown,
In his squalid cheerless den:
She's a fairy truly, then! *

Still more artistically suggestive and much more comprehensive is the last of this trio of ballads which chant the soul's self of a serious Bab; pessimistic though it be in tone, "At a Pantomime" is undoubtedly one of Bab's best efforts, personally I should say the best fulfilment of Gilbert's artistic promise.

AT A PANTOMIME.*

An Actor sits in doubtful gloom,
His stock-in-trade unfurled,
In a damp funereal dressing-room
In the Theatre Royal, World.

* "The Bab Ballads and Songs of a Savoyard." Macmillan.

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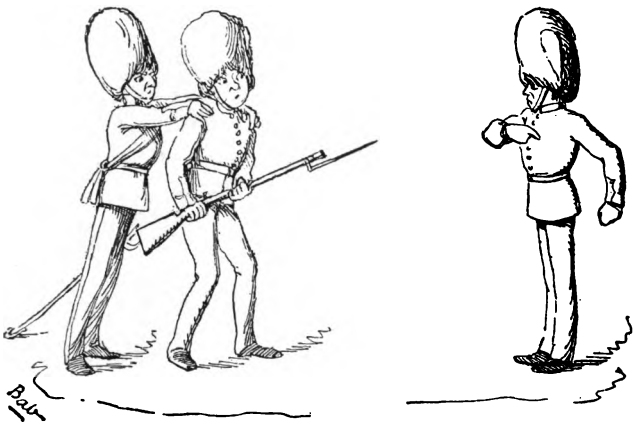

ILLUSTRATION TO "MY DREAM"

ILLUSTRATION TO "ONLY A DANCING GIRL"

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He comes to town at Christmas-time,
And braves its icy breath,
To play in that favourite pantomime,
Harlequin Life and Death.

A hoary flowing wig his weird
Unearthly cranium caps,
He hangs a long benevolent beard
On a pair of empty chaps.

To smooth his ghastly features down
The actor's art he cribs,—
A long and a flowing padded gown
Bedecks his rattling ribs.

He cries, "Go on—begin, begin!
Turn on the light of lime—
I'm dressed for jolly old Christmas, in
A favourite pantomime!"

The curtain's up—the stage all black—
Time and the year nigh sped—
Time as an advertising quack—
The Old Year nearly dead.

The wand of Time is waved, and lo!
Revealed Old Christmas stands,
And little children chuckle and crow,
And laugh and clap their hands.

The cruel old scoundrel brightens up
At the death of the Olden Year,
And he waves a gorgeous golden cup,
And bids the world good cheer.

The little ones hail the festive King,—
No thought can make them sad.
Their laughter comes with a sounding ring,
They clap and crow like mad!

They only see in the humbug old
A holiday every year,
And handsome gifts, and joys untold,
And unaccustomed cheer.

The old ones, palsied, blear, and hoar,
Their breasts in anguish beat—
They've seen him seventy times before,
How well they know the cheat!

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They've seen that ghastly pantomime,
They've felt its blighting breath,
They know that rollicking Christmas-time
Meant Cold and Want and Death,—

Starvation—Poor Law Union fare—
And deadly cramps and chills,
And illness—illness everywhere,
And crime, and Christmas bills.

They know Old Christmas well, I ween,
Those men of ripened age;
They've often, often, often seen
That actor off the stage!

They see in his gay rotundity
A clumsy stuffed-out dress—
They see in the cup he waves on high
A tinselled emptiness.

Those aged men so lean and wan,
They've seen it all before,
They know they'll see the charlatan
But twice or three times more.

And so they bear with dance and song
And crimson foil and green,
They wearily sit, and grimly long
For the Transformation Scene.

A critical review of Bab's humorous ballads, with the luminous exposition of Savoy Opera to assist our judgment, reveals the fact that Gilbert relies to a great extent on intellect when seeking to excite laughter, but in the few grave themes characteristic of a small minority of these Ballads, we see the disquieting assertiveness of the artistic temperament responsible for Gilbert's dominating ambition to excel in the domain of serious dramatic art.

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CHAPTER IV

GILBERT AS PLAYWRIGHT

GILBERT owes his first commission to write a play to Tom Robertson, who in 1866 brought him under the notice of Miss Herbert. Miss Herbert was then managing the St. James's Theatre and she asked Robertson to write her something suitable for a Christmas entertainment. As he was too pressed with work to comply with her request he suggested that she would do well to apply to W. S. Gilbert, the talented young author of the Bab Ballads, who had a strong dramatic bent and would undoubtedly make his mark in the theatrical world. As the result of this recommendation Miss Herbert arranged for an interview with Gilbert, the outcome of which was that Gilbert undertook to write the play required and deliver his manuscript within ten days. He chose for his subject the Elixir of Love, and wrote his play, which he called *Dulcamara, or the Little Duck and the Great Quack*, in eight days; it was produced after being rehearsed for ten days and enjoyed a five months' successful run. All the arrangements had to be made so hurriedly that the question of fees was not discussed till after *Dulcamara* had been produced and favourably noticed by the Press, when Mr. Emden, Miss Herbert's business-manager, sent for the author and asked what he expected to be paid for his work. Gilbert thought for a moment; it had taken him a week to write the play, and £20 for a week's work might be considered quite good pay; then he

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remembered the ten rehearsals; reckoning his time at £1 for each rehearsal he totted up the total to £30, and after a little more mental arithmetic and reflection he named thirty guineas as his fee.

"Oh," replied Emden, "we never pay in guineas, make it thirty pounds"; and Gilbert closed with the offer.

After Emden had struck his bargain he turned to Gilbert and quietly remarked: "Now take an old stager's advice, never you sell as good a play as that for thirty pounds again."

"And I never did," adds Gilbert when he tells the story. As we think of that first fee it is interesting, from the financial standpoint, to gather some idea of the market value of his work at a later stage in his career; for *The Wedding March*, an adaptation of "Le Chapeau de Paille d'Italie," which was completed in two days, he received £2500, for the early Gilbert and Sullivan Operas produced at the Opéra Comique, he was paid five guineas a night during the run, and his third share of the profits of *Ruddigore*, the least monetarily successful of the Savoy cycle, was £7000.

The moment Gilbert scored his first success as a playwright all his inborn passion for the theatre laid hold on him with the full strength of accumulated force. He renounced journalism, resigned his position as dramatic critic to the *Illustrated London Times* and devoted his whole energy to writing for the stage. From the numerical point of view he has scored a record with his plays, and even if we take into consideration his natural ability to work with extraordinary rapidity, we cannot help but be impressed by the steady perseverance with which he pursued his life's purpose, directly he had made up his mind that he would make for the theatrical goal. Farce, burlesque, pantomime, operetta, extravaganza, comedy and tragedy, one after another they followed in such quick succession that even Gilbert himself has now quite forgotten what some of these plays were

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about, and as an incidental result of his dogged energy I find myself confronted with the Herculean task of having to attempt to deal with about fifty plays in one short chapter of a short biography.

Gilbert's achievements as a playwright may roughly be classified under three headings; first, the plays which have had their heyday of theatrical life; secondly, the stock pieces which are still played outside the barriers of critical dramatic circles and are favourites in the amateur's repertoire, and thirdly, three plays, *The Wicked World*, *Broken Hearts*, and *Gretchen*, which are dearest of all his work to Gilbert, being the plays in which he strove, in the name of Art, to express his conception of life.

Amongst the plays which have had their day of dramatic success are Gilbert's farces. Old-fashioned farces may, as we are told, have been much better acted than the modern article of that description, but even with such compensation we cannot wish them back with us; they are as forced as the laughter they could excite in the days when the so-called comic stage character relied on a grotesque make-up for applause. I have not the slightest desire to foster a wholesale condemnation of farce—Gilbert himself has shown us its legitimate possibilities in *Trial by Jury;* exaggeration for caricature's sake may be an amusing form of entertainment, but a conglomeration of artificial absurdities bearing absolutely no relation to the possible or the probable is not to be tolerated. Take the three farcical plays which are still preserved amongst Gilbert's collected works, compare them with *Trial by Jury*, and I think you will give me your sympathy in my present Gilbertian situation. As a sincere admirer of Gilbert in his *rôle* of merry-making reformer I rejoice to be able to point out that *Tom Cobb*, *Engaged*, and *Foggerty's Fairy* were written in the days when exaggeration for exaggeration's sake was still a popular form of entertainment even though he had begun to adapt the circumstances of the

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stage, but as a wholly unsentimental advocate where the reputation of the drama is at stake, I should be obliged to admit that when reading these plays I hear the crackling of thorns under a pot, even though I am not blind to the fact that *Foggerty's Fairy* is based on an original idea.

In addition to these farces, dramatic literature has handed down to the present generation *The Princess*, *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern*, and *Charity*. *The Princess* is a "respectful perversion of Tennyson's poem." The movement for the higher education of women has made such rapid strides that any play dealing with it in its early stages must lose in interest by being date-stamped. Much as we may admire Tennyson's attitude with regard to this cause it must be admitted that a good deal of his philosophising has already become platitudinous, in these days when women do not lay down their love for education, and for a like reason some of the humour of Gilbert's *Princess* falls short of the mark. Both versions have the merit of historical interest: Gilbert's is certainly more in accordance with the modern tendency amongst women themselves to ridicule the idea that they can be unsexed by education, and to smile good-naturedly at the dear old gentleman who regales the chiffon-disguised Newnham graduate at a dinner-party with his views on the woman question, and whispers to her in confidence that she is his beau ideal of a womanly woman. I am sure I voice the sentiments of many of my sex when I say that I hope Mrs. D'Oyly Carte is going to include Gilbert's operatic version of his *Princess* in the Savoy revivals; it is always amusing when we have grown up to look at photographs of ourselves as children. All these versions of *The Princess* always remind me of the days when I possessed a small book entitled "The Leading Dates of English History," on the fly-leaf of which was penned in bold roundhand: "Girls, knowledge is now no more a fountain seal'd—drink deep!"

Rosencrantz and Guildenstern is a clever burlesque of

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Hamlet. King Claudius and Queen Gertrude are much distressed at their son's tendency to soliloquise, and the Queen in her anxiety sends for Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, two merry knaves, to bid them devise such revels in the Court "as shall abstract his meditative mind from sad employment." They produce in comedy vein a tragedy written by the King; Hamlet plays the principal part so successfully that by request he stops in the middle of the first Act as it is feared that the audience will die with laughter! King Claudius, who has meanwhile recognised his tragedy, which having been condemned as a tragedy none may now mention under pain of death, wrathfully declares that both his worthless son and his worthless play shall perish. The Queen pleads for Hamlet, who, on his knees, cries imploringly to his father: "Hold thine hand! I can't bear death—I'm a philosopher." The King realises the logic of this appeal, but is troubled to know how to dispose of Hamlet, when Ophelia suddenly exclaims:

A thought!
There is a certain isle beyond the sea
Where dwell a cultured race—compared with whom
We are but poor brain-blind barbarians;
'Tis known as Engle-land. Oh, send him there!
If but the half I've heard of them be true
They will enshrine him on their great good hearts,
And men will rise or sink in good esteem
According as they worship him, or slight him!

Claudius.
Well, we're dull dogs in Denmark. It may be
That we've misjudged him. If such a race there be—
(There may be—I am not a well-read man)
They're welcome to his philosophic brain—
So, Hamlet, get thee gone—and don't come back again!

[HAMLET, *who is delighted at the suggestion, . . . strikes an attitude, exclaiming: "To Engle-land!"*]

I can well imagine that in the dim and distant future the authorship of *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern* will be the

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subject of as many heated discussions as the Bacon-Shakespeare controversy; there will be some who bring forward indisputable evidence to show that Gilbert wrote it, and there will be others who bring forward equally indisputable evidence to prove that none but George Bernard Shaw would have dared to write it!

In *Charity* we have a complete exposition of Gilbert's ethics; his creed, summed up in his own words, is the only possible basis of relationship between art and morality: "I believe in the morality of God Almighty and not in that of Mrs. Grundy." The play is written round society's dictum "that a woman who has once forfeited her moral position shall never regain it." The woman in this case, a Mrs. Van Brugh living as a widow under the shield of her dead lover's name, practises charity in the widest sense of the word. For instance, Ruth Tredgett, a tramp, is found in Mrs. Van Brugh's pantry, and the wild-looking woman is dragged by the servants before their mistress, who is shown a decanter of sherry with which she was about to decamp. On her own confession she was brought up to be a thief, and is an old ticket o' leave who, ruined by a "psalm-singing villain" in her search for honest work, has again taken to stealing as the only means of livelihood: but Mrs. Van Brugh sees in her the victim of circumstances and offers to be her friend. When this apostle of charity exclaims: "Who shall say what the very best of us might not have been but for the accident of education and good example?" it is Gilbert himself who speaks, Gilbert the Justice of the Peace, who says that whenever he has a prisoner in the dock before him he always asks himself: "What chance in life has this man had?"—Gilbert who frankly admits that he is an honest man because he has never had the temptation to be otherwise. A conversation in *Charity* between Dr. Athelney, a Colonial Bishop-Elect, and Ruth Tredgett, expresses the attitude of Gilbert, the humane magistrate.

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Dr. Athelney. Well, you hear what this man says; did you take this wine?
Ruth. Ay, I took it, sure enough.
Dr. A. Why did you take it?
Ruth. Why, to drink, of course. Why *should* I take it?
Dr. A. You *shouldn't* take it.
Ruth. Don't you never take wine?
Dr. A. Not other people's wine—except, of course with their permission.
Ruth. Maybe you've got a cellar of your own.
Dr. A. Maybe I have.
Ruth. Well, maybe *I* haven't. That's my answer.

The broad-minded spirit of charity in this play is thoroughly progressive, witness an altercation between Fred Smailey, a smug saint, and Mrs. Van Brugh, who has just scandalised the village by putting a real live Dissenter into one of her almshouses, where a Roman Catholic and a Jew are already installed.

Fred. But, my dear Mrs. Van Brugh, you mean well I'm sure—but a Jew, a Catholic, and a Dissenter!—is there no such thing as a starving Churchman to be found?
Mrs. V. B. There are but too many starving men of all denominations, but while I'm hunting out the Churchman, the Jew, the Catholic and the Dissenter will perish, and that would never do, would it?
Fred. That is the Christianity of Impulse. I would feed him that belonged to my own church, and if he did not belong to it, I would not feed him at all.
Mrs. V. B. That is the Christianity of Religious Politics. As to these poor people, they will shake down and agree very well in time. Nothing is so conducive to toleration as the knowledge that one's bread depends upon it.

Do not imagine from this little conversation that Gilbert is identifying himself with party politics; recall the invitation in *Iolanthe* to rejoice with loud Fal lal,

That Nature wisely does contrive—Fal, lal, la!
That every boy and every gal,
That's born into the world alive,
Is either a little Liberal,
Or else a little Conservative!

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In the light of this invitation a subsequent incident in the history of these almshouses will not seem at all incongruous. When the village learns that Mrs. Van Brugh is Miss Brandreth, albeit she has a daughter, Gilbert wields the Moderate pen and indulges in a delicate satire on Progressive ideals; here is the letter which Mrs. Van Brugh received from her undenominational pensioners:

> We, the aged occupants of the Locroft Almshouses, are humbly pained and respectfully shocked at the disclosures that have recently been made with reference to Miss Brandreth's relations with the late Captain Van Brugh. We trust that it is unnecessary for us to add that, if it were not that the Almshouses pass at once from Miss Brandreth's hands into those of an upright and stainless Christian, whom it is an honour respectfully to know and a satisfaction humbly to profit by, we would not have consented to occupy them for another day; we would rather have worked for our living.

The "upright and stainless Christian" is the villain of the play, who publishes the story of Mrs. Van Brugh's free-love match in order to help forward his own mean scheme for obtaining her money, and is ultimately convicted of forging a burial certificate to get some trust-funds into his possession. We take leave of Miss Brandreth as she voices her intention of sailing to a new land to teach, as a humble penitent, the lessons of Charity. I have dealt somewhat fully with this play, because it so clearly shows the nature of the moral conscience that is constantly in evidence in the libretti of the Savoy Operas. There are some very dramatic situations in *Charity*, but the plot is a little involved, and when the dialogue is in the wholly serious vein it is inclined to be stilted and would hardly carry the emotions of the characters over the footlights of the modern theatre in a way calculated to do justice to their ethical views.

One other form in which Gilbert cast his plays with great success for a time must be noticed: this is *The Fairy Comedy*, to which the present generation has recently been

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introduced by the Mermaid Society's production of *The Palace of Truth*. In this particular play the only suggestions of fairyland are an enchanted palace in which every one is bound to speak "the simple, unadulterated truth," and a talisman which enables its fortunate possessor, whoever he may be, to counteract the charm. Given such supernatural assistance the satirist has boundless opportunities, and Gilbert has contrived in his comedy to entertainingly parry and thrust many simple, unadulterated truths, but unless one happens to be a fatalist, credulity is overstrained by the length of this play, in which the poignant satire demands serious consideration.

Foremost amongst Gilbert's plays which are still acted are *Pygmalion and Galatea*, *Creatures of Impulse*, *Dan'l Druce*, *Sweethearts*, and *Comedy and Tragedy*, all of which are well known, and popular as "stock" plays particularly amongst amateur theatrical companies. These were all written, as Gilbert himself says, with an idea to pleasing everybody who pays for admission to the theatre where they are played, on the assumption that an audience is composed of two classes, "stalls and gallery." The Gallery First-Nighters would, of course, all be included in the "stalls" class under this policy; they would quickly weed out all the conventional sentiment that is not meant for them, and pronounce their own share to be of a fair average quality, good in craftsmanship, except that the "asides" are now technically out of date, weak in prose dialogue, but generally approaching a very fair literary standard in verse. *Dan'l Druce* is specially interesting as being one of the earliest London productions in which Marion Terry had a leading part; Gilbert, with his natural ability for recognising mimetic talent, was confident that she had a career before her, and engaged her to play Dorothy in *Dan'l Druce* at a salary of £7 a week. Since that play was produced at the Theatre Royal, Haymarket, on September 11, 1876, Marion Terry has steadily continued

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to win the hearts of the theatrical public by her wholly delightful, magnetic personality.

Two of the three plays which are Gilbert's personal favourites, viz., *The Wicked World* and *Broken Hearts*, belong to the Fairy Series, whilst the third, *Gretchen*, is a version of the Faust legend.

The scene of *The Wicked World* opens in a pure fairy-land, "where mortal love is utterly unknown"; the spotless inhabitants live happily together out of temptation's reach in a state of tranquil brotherhood, and imagination could not picture more ideal beings, although the keen observer might discover that they suffer from "an overweening sense of righteousness." They have often wandered in fancy through that wicked, wondrous world that rolls in silent cycles at their feet, but it seems highly improbable that they will ever know anything definite about it, when suddenly Lutin, one of their community, is summoned to mid-earth by the Fairy King. Lutin returns to fairyland with the news that their monarch is contemplating the bestowal of a new privilege on his subjects, and sends a royal command for Ethais and Phyllon to accompany him back to mid-earth to learn the nature of the boon to be conferred. Before the three representatives set forth, Selene, the Fairy Queen, and Darine and Zayda her fairy friends, beg Lutin to tell them about the Wicked World, on which he has been the first of their race to set foot. He explains that everything he saw "is utterly improper to be seen," declares that his tongue shall wither ere he repeats the details of his experience, and bids them read his story in his blushes of indignant shame. When Lutin, Ethais, and Phyllon have departed to mid-earth, Selene, Darine, and Zayda recall a half-forgotten law which says:

> That when a fairy quits his fairy home
> To visit earth, those whom he leaves behind
> May summon from the wicked world below

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That absent fairy's mortal counterpart ;
And that that mortal counterpart may stay
In fairy land and fill the fairy's place
Till he return.

In a philanthropic spirit they upbraid themselves for having neglected to use their power "to shape the fortunes of mankind" by having held aloof from the foul creatures in the wicked world, leaving them to pursue their blind and wayward will, and at length they decide to summon to fairyland the mortal counterparts of Ethais and Phyllon. These mortals shall see for themselves the beauties of a sinless life, and without a doubt they will return to earth and regenerate the wicked world whose sole compensation for sin and misery is mortal love. But directly the mortals appear in their midst the fairies sigh their love for them, jealous rivalry springs up, the immortals stoop to every conceivable form of meanness to win a mortal lover, till at length, when the fairies are thoroughly demoralised, the fairy prototypes of the visitors come back from mid-earth, and the mortals cheerfully return to the wicked world without the slightest desire to remodel it on fairy lines. The fairies have ignominiously failed in their mission, as they realise when mortal love is no longer in their midst, and when this love is offered them by their own Ethais in the name of the Fairy King as the new privilege, the priceless gift that is henceforth to be theirs for evermore, the repentant fairies beg that such a baneful influence be not allowed to assail their stronghold ; in their name Selene the Fairy Queen cries eagerly :

No, no—not that—no, Ethais—not that !
It is a deadly snare—beware of it !
Such love is for mankind, and not for us ;
It is the very essence of the earth,
A mortal emblem, bringing in its train
The direst passions of its antitype.
No, Ethais—we will not have this love ;
Let us glide through our immortality

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Upon the placid lake of sister-love,
Nor tempt the angry billows of a sea,
Which, though it carry us to unknown lands,
Is so beset with rocks and hidden shoals,
That we may perish ere our vessel reach
The unsafe haven of its distant shore.
No, Ethais—we will not have this love!

To be in the presence of a favourite child dearly beloved by its creator is to be gripped by a sentiment with which it is not easy to break, but *The Wicked World* was written in the name of Art, and in the name of Art must it therefore be criticised. The root idea of this play is vital, so vital that it calls for masterly treatment, and at the outset it is undoubtedly a master hand that deals with the subject of the Great Untempted. The opening scene is so poetic in quality and dramatic in form that it seems to herald one of the finest plays of the poetic drama. We have the happy, but self-righteous fairies in a beauteous cloudland exempt from the storms of passion that play such havoc with our wicked world; through a rent in the cloud we catch a bird's-eye view of a mediæval city inhabited by human nature's sinful counterparts of these perfect supernatural beings, and poetic fancy wandering through that city reveals to us and to the fairies both the misery and the charm of mortal life with its great gift of mortal love. The fairies' lot is the tranquil life of purity; what is the mortal's inheritance?

"I wonder what my counterpart is doing now?" murmurs Darine, as she looks down on that mediæval city:

Selene. Don't ask.
No doubt, some fearful sin!
Darine. And what are sins?
Selene. Evils of which we hardly know the names.
There's vanity—a quaint, fantastic vice,
Whereby a mortal takes much credit for
The beauty of his face and form, and claims
As much applause for loveliness as though

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He had designed himself! Then jealousy—
A universal passion—one that claims
An absolute monopoly of love,
Based on the reasonable principle
That no one merits other people's love
So much as—every soul on earth by turns!
Envy—that grieves at other men's success,
As though success, however placed, were not
A contribution to one common fund!
Ambition, too, the vice of clever men
Who seek to rise at others' cost; nor heed
Whose wings they cripple, so that they may soar.
Malice—the helpless vice of helpless fools,
Who, as they cannot rise, hold others down,
That they, by contrast, may appear to soar.
Hatred and avarice, untruthfulness,
Murder and rapine, theft, profanity—
Sins so incredible, so mean, so vast,
Our nature stands appalled when it attempts
To grasp their terrible significance.
Such are the vices of that wicked world!

Yet why do men live on in such a world when they can summon death at will?

Selene. With all their misery, with all their sin,
With all the elements of wretchedness
That teem on that unholy world of theirs,
They have one great and ever-glorious gift,
That compensates for all they have to bear—
The gift of Love! Not as we use the word,
To signify mere tranquil brotherhood;
But in some sense that is unknown to us.
Their love bears like relation to our own,
That the fierce beauty of the noonday sun
Bears to the calm of a soft summer's eve.
It nerves the wearied mortal with hot life,
And bathes his soul in hazy happiness.
The richest man is poor who hath it not,
And he who hath it laughs at poverty.
It hath no conqueror. When death himself
Has worked his very worst, this love of theirs
Lives still upon the loved one's memory.
It is a strange enchantment, which invests
The most unlovely things with loveliness.
The maiden, fascinated by this spell,
Sees everything as she would have it be:

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Her squalid cot becomes a princely home;
Its stunted shrubs are groves of stately elms;
The weedy brook that trickles past her door
Is a broad river fringed with drooping trees;
And of all marvels the most marvellous,
The coarse unholy man who rules her love
Is a bright being—pure as we are pure;
Wise in his folly—blameless in his sin;
The incarnation of a perfect soul;
A great and ever-glorious demi-god!

When the fairies determine to take up their responsibility of shaping the fortunes of mankind we seem to hear the clash of swords in a dramatic conflict between Destiny and Free Will; when they cast to earth two roses, newly plucked, with the gentle command, "Go, send thy mortal namesake to our cloud," we think of the Fairy Queen's sympathetic revelation of human love, and in the intensity of the seconds in which the air is charged with music whilst we await the coming of mortals to fairyland, we say to ourselves, "Here is a great dramatic subject, a vital theme, the mystic love of the gods matching its strength against the magic flame that burns in the heart of the demi-god Man."

Unfortunately Gilbert seems to have overlooked the deeper significance of his theme at precisely the moment when he dropped the roses to earth, for the mortals who forthwith appear in fairyland are not at all the sort of human beings that we associate with the ideal of a demi-god. They are of the commonplace philandering type, with no comprehension of the mortal love whose magic power Gilbert has so poetically charmed into the opening scene of his play. There is no lack of skill in the portrayal of these characters, but there is an artistic error in their selection; undoubtedly the fairies are humorously shown up to the worst advantage when their love for such poor specimens of humanity prompts them to indulge in mean, petty jealous strife and passionate outbursts of frenzied adoration for such men, but the author has selected his

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mortals with a view to pointing the moral that the untempted saint should be careful not to cast stones at the sinner in a world of action, and the selection is inartistic because we feel that it was influenced by that moral, instead of the moral being the natural significance of an unbiased selection of characters who should bring mortal love into contact with self-righteous perfection. Gilbert's mortals are not typical of the great love which is a strange enchantment, but merely of that debased aspect of it which he reveals when he makes one of them exclaim:

> Why, Love's the germ
> Of every sin that stalks upon the earth:
> The brawler fights for love—the drunkard drinks
> To toast the girl who loves him, or to drown
> Remembrance of the girl who loves him not!
> The miser hoards his gold to purchase love.
> The liar lies to gain, or wealth, or love;
> And if for wealth, it is to purchase love.
> The very footpad nerves his coward arm
> To stealthy deeds of shame by pondering on
> The tipsy kisses of some tavern wench!
> Be not deceived—this love is but the seed;
> The branching tree that springs from it is Hate!

Such love lends itself to levity of treatment which is inconsistent with the great underlying theme of *The Wicked World*; it should only have been introduced into fairyland as the counterfeit of love to act as a foil to the pathos and joy of the inspiring Love which chains man to the battlefield of life and makes his every sin pale into insignificance beside the sin of that overweening self-righteousness which haunts the peaceful citadel of the untempted soul. As I reflect on the possibilities of the theme of *The Wicked World* I recall the mythological legend of Marpessa, and am reminded of Stephen Phillips' poetical re-creation of the scene in which Marpessa, given her choice between the god Apollo and the mortal Idas, chooses Idas. In imagination I piece such a scene into the wider scheme of

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The Wicked World, and then as I look back at Gilbert's masterly opening scene I feel as if some mischievous imp had cheated the world of a masterpiece.

The Wicked World was produced at the Haymarket Theatre in 1873, and ran for 200 nights. Shortly after its production Gilbert conceived the idea of rewriting the play in a wholly humorous vein as a political skit: the fairies should summon to their abode of bliss three leading politicians of the day, Gladstone, Ayrton, and Lowe, and learn for themselves the nature of that inestimable boon, the spirit of Party Politics, which has been conferred on mere man by the powers that be.

Gilbert drew up his scenario of *The Happy Land* and wrote the musical numbers of the play which was completed by Gilbert à Becket and produced by Miss Marie Litton at the Court Theatre. The success of this huge political joke was instantaneous and phenomenal; at first the public flocked to the Court to uproariously enjoy the fun of seeing the three stage politicians made up as the living images of their actual counterparts, but in a very short time the Lord Chamberlain put his veto on this personal touch, and the make-up had to be altered so that the stage should in no way encroach on the traditions of political dignity. But Gladstone, Ayrton, and Lowe were easily recognisable even in disguise as they merrily acted their parts in *The Happy Land*, and night after night a packed house rocked with delight as they played havoc with fairy government by bringing it into touch with modern politics. The whole joke was perpetrated in a quite good-natured spirit and Gilbert is happy in the recollection of having seen Gladstone himself convulsed with laughter in the stalls as he followed his own adventures in fairyland.

To return to Gilbert's serious work, we have yet to consider the two other plays written in the name of Art, *Broken Hearts* and *Gretchen*. *Broken Hearts* is the result of a whole year's earnest work, and at the end of the published copies

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of the play is a note which gives us some idea of the demand made on the soul's self of the author by that work—"Finished, Monday, 15th November, 1875, at 12-40 A.M. Thank God." *Broken Hearts* enjoyed an 85 nights' run when it was produced at the Court Theatre almost immediately after it was finished. Were I not pressed for space, I would not be so heartless as to pass on to the weakness of its appeal after merely recording the fact that it enshrines Gilbert's finest interpretation of human nature as the motive-power of a really human being, the poetically-drawn, tragic character of Mousta, a deformed dwarf. *Broken Hearts* relies on pathos for its appeal, but Vavir, the sweet, gentle Vavir, who ends the story by apparently dying of love so that her sister Hilda may marry Prince Florian, to whom they have both given their hearts, is not a genuinely pathetic character. In the tenderness of his heart Gilbert has fallen in love with Vavir, because she is naturally delicate; in the fulness of his pitying love he invests her fragile body with the soul of an angel, only allowing she is human by making her weak and ailing. The only real pathos of the death-scene is the pathos of the sick room, for death in Vavir's case is the result of a weak heart rather than a broken heart, although the strain of feeling that she stood in her sister's way may have somewhat hastened her end. Still we cannot help feeling here that death is merciful since it saves Hilda and Prince Florian, who really love each other, from being prompted by pity to sacrifice themselves for an angel who is physically unfit for marriage. Vavir was certainly born with a sweet disposition, but she is hardly the character we should expect to find selected for the heroine's part in a play written by a man who has shown us in *The Wicked World* his broad-minded estimate of original goodness and original sin; her delicate constitution is mainly responsible for her taking to her death-bed as the means of escape from a triangular problem, whereby we miss in *Broken Hearts* that inevitable fight with the devil,

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which must take place in the solution of any such problem if one of three human beings is to come out of the miserable tangle as a conquering angel, and leave the other two free to enjoy their Earthly Paradise.

It is the devil, too, that we miss in *Gretchen*, Gilbert's version of the Faust legend, which took nine months to write, and was produced at the Olympic Theatre in 1879; it was withdrawn after a fortnight's run, the theatre having been sold from that date during rehearsals. True, the Spirit of Evil plays an active part in *Gretchen*, but there is no subtle demand on his powers. Goethe's Mephistopheles is weary of winning easy victories in the tavern and the gaming-house, and when in a moment of inspiration he hears the call of the blood echoing in Faust's study, he is fired with the desire to add a student to his list of conquests. Gilbert's Faustus is a man-about-town in the guise of a monk; his Mephisto is mainly concerned with winning Gretchen, who, by her pure and blameless life, has done more harm to his cause in eighteen years "than all the monks in Christendom can mend"; consequently Mephisto is willing to waive any question of a compact with Faustus when he frees him from a monastery, whither he has repaired in a temporary revulsion of feeling against all women on finding that men have not the monopoly of deception. Faustus is burning to get back into the world of action, when Mephisto appears at his bidding, and seeks to restore his faith in womankind by telling him of Gretchen. Faustus takes up an offensive attitude:

Faustus. If there live such a one as thou hast painted—
A maiden—pure as the blue breath of Heaven,
Into whose virgin heart no dream of ill
Hath ever crept—the bloom of whose pure lips
Is yet unbrushed by man's polluting touch;
Whose life is open as the very truth—
A perfect type of blameless maidenhood,
Take me to her, and I *will* learn of her.

Mephisto. Humph! No, I'd rather not.

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Faustus. And why?
Mephisto. You see,
We devils have our consciences. In vice
We can do nearly all that man can do,
But not quite all. There are some forms of sin
From which we shrink—and this is one of them.
I have no stomach for such worldly work.
Best get a man to help you.
Faustus. Mocking fiend,
Misjudge me not. As there's a heaven and hell,
I mean the maid no wrong. I'll take thy help,
If thou wilt give it me. But be forewarned;
I'll make no compact with thee. Set me free,
And I will fight thee with the holy aid
Of her pure innocence. Be thou forewarned.
Mephisto. I like your frankness! Well, you're not the first
Who's tried to rise to heaven on my shoulders!
Humph! I don't know. I am a match for *you*.
But you and she allied! The odds are heavy!
Well, I'm a student still, and always glad
To glean experience where and how I can.
I'm curious to see how this will end;
If *for* me—good; but if against me—well,
I shall but lose *you*, and you're no great stake,
And so I'll risk it.

Here Faustus merely appeals to Mephisto's sporting instinct and whatever Mephisto may say we feel that there are heavy odds in his favour. Both Mephisto and Faustus are of secondary importance in *Gretchen* whose name points to the central interest of the plot, and as it stands the play is a poetically-told everyday story of free-love, with a victim for whom hearts may bleed, and a betrayer with whom it is impossible to heartily sympathise even in his remorse. From the point of view of literature *Gretchen* is far superior to many successful plays, but from the dramatic standpoint it lacks the vital significance of a Mephistopheles who, as a capable student of the higher intellectual type of man, inspired Goethe's great message to all mankind in his classic treatment of the Faust legend.

Looking at the aggregate of Gilbert's sublime efforts to create a serious dramatic masterpiece, we have substantial

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evidence of literary talent and dramatic craftsmanship which for a time won for him the place of honour as the most successful dramatic author of the period, but if we are searching for possible classics from the point of view of dramatic art, the sum total of his efforts is a splendid failure, enshrining the masterly opening scene of *The Wicked World* and the vivid, comprehensive portrayal of Mousta, the pathetically human dwarf. I breathe a heartfelt sigh of relief as I write this last unpleasant truth in the unpleasant name of duty; in a moment I shall be free to enter on the pleasant task of telling the story of Gilbert's unique success and world-wide popularity, but one last word of the artist to whose heart *The Wicked World*, *Broken Hearts*, and *Gretchen* are dearer than the Savoy Operas. As we think of his favourite plays and our favourite comic operas, are we not reminded of the Story of Er and his spirit-companions? As we hear Lachesis exclaiming to these spirits, "Mortal Souls, behold a new cycle of mortal life! Your genius will not choose you, but you will choose your genius," do we not reflect on the curious fact that many a successful man would fain owe his success to some medium other than that by which it has been attained, many a genius would, if given his choice, choose to be a genius of a different type! Doubtless the philosopher could advance some original theory concerning this strange aspect of the psychology of genius; I can only recall Browning's poetic interpretation of the mystery in "One Word More," and murmur to myself:

> Dante once prepared to paint an angel:
> . . . . . .
> Dante standing, studying his angel,—
> In there broke the folk of his Inferno.

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CHAPTER V

OUR NATIONAL OPERA

THE honour of introducing Gilbert to the late Sir Arthur Sullivan belongs to Fred Clay the composer, to whom the world at large is therefore indebted for the initial move in what has proved such an eventful partnership. Gilbert had collaborated with Fred Clay in writing a musical play called *Ages Ago* for the German Reeds; Sullivan, on hearing that the author of the "Bab Ballads" was working with his friend Clay, expressed a wish to meet Gilbert and was invited by Clay to go to a rehearsal of *Ages Ago* at the old Gallery of Illustration, Regent Street, where the momentous introduction took place. This was in 1871, long before Arthur Sullivan was rewarded by his grateful country with a knighthood; the acquaintance soon ripened into a friendship in which author and composer joined forces, but no striking success resulted from the collaboration till the early days of 1875 when *Trial by Jury* was produced.

Trial by Jury had already been published in *Fun* by Bab. Gilbert elaborated it for the Parepa-Rosa Opera Company and it was set to music by Carl Rosa, but the arrangements for producing it fell through owing to the death of Parepa-Rosa, Carl Rosa's wife. Gilbert then took the libretto to Sullivan, who was ill in bed at the time, but happily not too ill to enter heartily into the spirit of the fun as Gilbert read his merry satire on the Law Courts.

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Delighted at the idea of giving the musical finish to this one-act play, Sullivan set to work at once on the score and *Trial by Jury* was produced at the Soho Theatre, now the Royalty, on March 25, 1875. The success of the venture can hardly be said to be remarkable, for bearing in mind the whimsical and dramatic qualities of both libretto and music, it would indeed have been remarkable if such an operetta had not instantaneously met with the appreciation it merits.

With the instinct of the dramatist, Gilbert cuts straight away into his story in this one-act parody of a breach of promise case. The scene is a Court of Justice, in which Barristers, Attorneys, Jurymen and Usher are discovered, and as the curtain goes up the chorus at once makes the situation clear:

Hark, the hour of ten is sounding!
Hearts with anxious fears are bounding;
Hall of Justice crowds surrounding,
Breathing hope and fear—
For to-day in this arena,
Summoned by a stern subpœna,
Edwin, sued by Angelina,
Shortly will appear.

The Usher then marshals the Jury into the Jury-box, and we quickly find out the spirit in which this trial is to be conducted:

*Usher.**
Now, Jurymen, hear my advice—
All kinds of vulgar prejudice
I pray you set aside:
With stern judicial frame of mind,
From bias free of every kind,
This trial must be tried.

Chorus.
From bias free of every kind
This trial must be tried.

* "The Bab Ballads and Songs of a Savoyard." Macmillan.

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TRIAL BY JURY

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Usher.
Oh, listen to the plaintiff's case:
Observe the features of her face—
The broken-hearted bride.
Condole with her distress of mind—
From bias free of every kind
This trial must be tried.

Chorus.
From bias free of every kind
This trial must be tried.

Usher.
And when amid the plaintiff's shrieks,
The ruffianly defendant speaks—
Upon the other side;
What *he* may say you needn't mind—
From bias free of every kind
This trial must be tried.

Chorus.
From bias free of every kind
This trial must be tried.

In the short compass of this trial Gilbert contrasts a romantic plaintiff, a disenchanted boyish defendant, a judge with an eye for beauty and a pretty contempt for the law, designing bridesmaids, and jurymen who, even if they are unbiased, can hardly be expected to be proof against feminine charm, and by widely different but always original methods these characters all contribute to the spontaneous fun which prevails whilst the broken-hearted Angelina sues the fickle-hearted Edwin and bewitches the judge into settling the case by offering to marry her himself. In *Trial by Jury* we find author and composer looking at the humorous side of life from exactly the same point of view, and we at once realise how Gilbert and Sullivan have been able to do for Comic Opera what Wagner has done for Grand Opera by combining words and music so as to make of them one Art.

The hearty reception accorded to this operetta naturally encouraged Gilbert and Sullivan to think of collaborating in a more ambitious venture, and it was whilst they were busy discussing their future plans that they were approached

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by the keen-sighted D'Oyly Carte, who had been acting-manager of the Soho Theatre at the time *Trial by Jury* was produced. D'Oyly Carte was now busily engaged in promoting an English Comic Opera Company to carry out his enterprising idea of developing comic opera and providing for it a permanent London home. He was an excellent man of business, and he had already enlisted sufficient practical sympathy with his scheme to justify him in looking round for a new opera that would enable his company to demonstrate by its first production that it had a new and definite policy. *Trial by Jury* had shown him that Gilbert and Sullivan also had some idea of developing comic opera on original lines, and to them he instinctively turned with the request that they would write the first opera for his new company. They readily acquiesced, and set to work on *The Sorcerer*, which was produced by the Comedy Opera Company at the Opéra Comique Theatre on November 17, 1877. The success of *The Sorcerer* fully justified the company in giving its authors a further commission, as a result of which *H.M.S. Pinafore* was produced at the Opéra Comique on May 25, 1878. After this production the Comedy Opera Company was wound up, but D'Oyly Carte took over the lease of the Opéra Comique, and for him Gilbert and Sullivan wrote *The Pirates of Penzance*, first produced on April 3, 1880, and *Patience*, which was first played on April 23, 1881. Meanwhile the Gilbert and Sullivan operas had become so popular that they had quite outgrown the limited accommodation of the Opéra Comique, and D'Oyly Carte saw that the happy time had now come when he might build a theatre such as he had dreamed of as the permanent home of English Comic Opera, which was now no longer a dream but a very successful reality. Under his direction the spacious Savoy Theatre was erected, with a view to providing suitable accommodation for the adequate representation of the Gilbert and Sullivan Operas, and ensuring the comfort of the public

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SCENE FROM "PATIENCE"
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who flocked to see them. The new theatre was opened on October 10, 1881, with *Patience*, which was transferred from the Opéra Comique, and for the space of nearly ten years following on this auspicious opening, Gilbert and Sullivan Operas were played nightly at the Savoy, practically speaking, without a break. *Iolanthe*, *Princess Ida*, *The Mikado*, *Ruddigore*, *The Yeomen of the Guard*, and *The Gondoliers* were the new productions during this period, and the ten years' programme was interspersed with various revivals of Gilbert and Sullivan work dating back to *Trial by Jury*. The run of *The Gondoliers* terminating on June 20, 1891, completed this era of unbroken popularity, when for two years Gilbert and Sullivan Opera was banished from the Savoy owing to an unfortunate misunderstanding between the three partners, which although it parted author and composer was in no way connected with their actual collaboration in these *rôles*. Meanwhile in 1892 Gilbert collaborated with Alfred Cellier in *The Mountebanks*, which was produced at the Lyric. Welcome indeed was the news which a few months later announced that the gulf between the ideal partners had been bridged, and unbounded was the enthusiasm with which the public greeted back in their home the dramatic triumvirate when *Utopia* was produced at the Savoy on October 7, 1893. The next Gilbert and Sullivan opera was *The Grand Duke*, which was produced at the Savoy on March 7, 1896, and this was destined to be the last opera of the famous cycle, for death claimed Sir Arthur on November 22, 1900, robbing the world of one of its most brilliant composers and Gilbert of his ideal collaborator and dearly beloved friend. With persistent success the old operas were revived between 1895 and 1901, whilst in 1894 *His Excellency*, by W. S. Gilbert and Dr. Osmond Carr, was produced at the Lyric; but Musical Comedy had meanwhile been invented, and the fiat went forth that Comic Opera was dead. In deference to Gilbert's express wish, I am sacrificing myself to the

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extent of here suppressing my opinions with regard to Musical Comedy, but I think I may venture to repeat a remark of his anent this particular form of entertainment: "Gags are inartistic, but Adrian Ross's lyrics are delightful." I console myself with the reflection that Gilbert has partly expressed my own views, and the public has summarised anything else I might like to say on the subject by its enthusiastically appreciative support of the present Savoy revivals, under the direction of Mrs. D'Oyly Carte.

Such briefly is the history of Savoy Opera. So far we have only dry bones, but we know that the mere mention of the word "Savoy" conjures up a living picture of quaintly charming personalities romping fantastically amongst the shadows of an historic building, making the walls of their home echo with merry laughter, and weaving a tradition that is dear to the heart of the playgoing world; how comes it that a charm has crept into that word "Savoy"? What is the spirit, what the substance of the incantation that worked the spell?

Gilbert and Sullivan entered into partnership with the object of achieving a definite ideal. When they began to write together for the stage the popular form of musical entertainment consisted in bowdlerised adaptations of the operas of such composers as Offenbach, Audran and Lecocq; if straightforward translations of foreign comic operas were produced they frequently savoured of impropriety, and so far as the staging was concerned "the ladies' dresses suggested that the management had gone on the principle of doing a little and doing it well." Gilbert and Sullivan were convinced that comic opera need not rely on any suggestion of vulgarity for its humour, and furthermore they aspired to being able to prove in some measure that England need not rely wholly on translations and adaptations for its humorous operatic fare. "We resolved," says Gilbert, "that our plots, however ridiculous, should be coherent, that our dialogue should be void of offence, that, on

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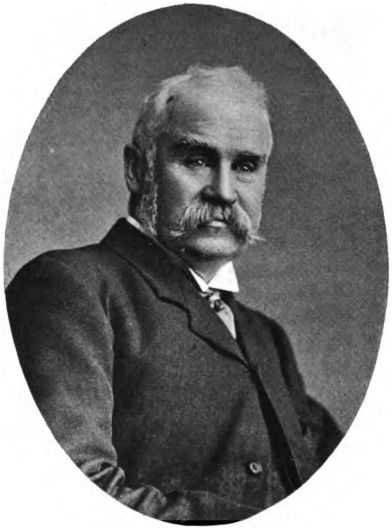
SIR ARTHUR SULLIVAN



MR. W. S. GILBERT

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artistic principles, no man should play a woman's part, and no woman a man's. Finally, we agreed that no lady of the company should be required to wear a dress that she could not wear with absolute propriety at a private fancy ball; and I believe I may say that we proved our case."

With "no vulgarity" as the keynote of their policy the two set to work and their general method of procedure was as follows—Gilbert, having first decided on his plot, drew up the scenario in a very detailed manner; he then went through this scenario with Sullivan and the two marked in the musical situations. Gilbert next wrote all the musical numbers of the first act with a short epitome of the dialogue that was to connect them, and sent his manuscript to Sullivan, and whilst Sullivan was composing the music of the 1st Act, Gilbert wrote the musical numbers of Act 2; he usually confined his libretti to two Acts, and whilst Sullivan was setting the 2nd Act to music Gilbert wrote up the dialogue of his play.

After the production of *Trial by Jury* the authors had not to concern themselves with finding a manager willing to produce their operas; D'Oyly Carte, with ideas and ambitions coinciding with their own, was entirely at their service. Much of the success of these operas was primarily due to the way in which author and composer worked together at the Savoy. Gilbert and Sullivan had an absolutely free hand both in writing and producing their operas, whilst D'Oyly Carte controlled the business side of the enterprise; all three were experts with implicit confidence in one another, and their work dovetailed into one harmonious whole with the development of English Comic Opera as its dominating spirit.

The opera having been written, Gilbert next planned out all the scenery and roughly designed the costumes, which were generally elaborated by Mr. Percy Anderson: then came the task of allotting parts and arranging the Chorus. Two somewhat exacting demands are made by

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Savoy Opera on the members of a cast—ability to sing and to act. At first the Savoy trio had to face the serious difficulty of finding promising interpreters; true they were producing comic opera, but it afforded no scope for the so-called comic man. They looked around for their principals amongst the younger musical entertainers such as took part in the German Reeds' drawing-room entertainments, feeling that their best chance was to secure talent that they could mould to suit the requirements of their new technique of humour. What they wanted to find can best be inferred from a speech made by Hamlet to the players in Gilbert's *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern* when he is about to produce King Claudius' five act tragedy: "I hold that there is no such antick fellow as your bombastical hero who doth so earnestly spout forth his folly as to make his hearers believe that he is unconscious of all incongruity; whereas, he who doth so mark, label and underscore his antick speeches as to show that he is alive to their absurdity seemeth to utter them under protest, and to take part with his audience against himself. (*Turning to players.*) For which reason, I pray you, let there be no huge red noses, no extravagant monstrous wigs, nor coarse men garbed as women, in this comi-tragedy; for such things are as much as to say 'I am a comick fellow—I pray you laugh at me, and hold what I say to be cleverly ridiculous.' Such labelling of humour is an impertinence to your audience, for it seemeth to imply that they are unable to recognise a joke unless it be pointed out to them. I pray you avoid it." Probably, too, the Savoy partners thought they could do best with young blood, because with older, trained mimes they might run the risk of having their ideas met in the spirit in which Hamlet's suggestions were received by his First Player—"Sir, we are beholden to you for your good counsels. But we would urge upon your consideration that we are accomplished players, who have spent many years in learning

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MR. D'OYLY CARTE
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our profession; and we would venture to suggest that it would better befit your lordship to confine yourself to such matters as your lordship may be likely to understand." Owing to the steady way in which the Savoy trio adhered to their determination to seek out young and promising artistes we number amongst the memory-fixed Savoyard stars, George Grossmith, Rutland Barrington, Walter Passmore, Miss Jessie Bond, the late Miss Rosina Brandram, Miss Nancy McIntosh, and many other distinguished favourites. The Chorus, too, was recruited on much the same principle; D'Oyly Carte was always ready to test any applicant; experience was not necessary, but "voice" was indispensable. As it soon became known that any member of the chorus who showed special ability was quickly singled out for small parts and given every opportunity to rise to the position of a principal, a superior class of candidates sought to join the ranks, and the tone of the Savoy Chorus was considerably raised in the scale of refinement. This was a matter of great importance in the production of comic operas whose delicate humour would be much impaired by any indelicacy in methods of interpretation.

Opera written, scenery and costumes arranged, parts allotted, the next step was for all the members of the cast to learn their words and music. Here Sullivan was to the fore, as Gilbert, notwithstanding his keen ear for rhythm, has no ear for music; he revels in Sullivan's tuneful airs but confesses that he could not be trusted to detect anything wrong if they were sung out of tune, in fact the impromptu insertion of a discord would probably give him a little extra pleasure.

Sullivan always insisted on having his music sung and played exactly as he had written it, and in the carrying out of his express wish in this respect he received much valuable assistance from Alfred Cellier, who conducted the early Gilbert and Sullivan Operas at the Opéra Comique, and from François Cellier, under whose able bâton the

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permanent Savoy Orchestra contributed to the general scheme of a homogeneous performance.

When the whole cast was word perfect and note perfect Gilbert appeared on the scene as stage-manager; this was the signal for a general squaring of shoulders; no one gave the word of command but none the less clearly it echoed through the ranks, and the whole company sprang to attention under the subtle influence of penetrating power. Everyone knew that Gilbert did not call a rehearsal in order to make experiments; he did all the rehearsing of his rehearsals at home, on a model stage, and went to the theatre knowing exactly what he wanted done and prepared to spare no trouble to get the effects he had in his mind's eye. He could be relied on never to lose patience under the most trying circumstances, never to summon anyone to attend on the mere chance of being needed, always respectfully to consider any suggestions, and quietly but wittily assert his authority should any over-zealous mime venture to improvise without permission or to show a too ready desire to claim the centre of the stage. By humane consideration he won the hearts of his company, by sheer ability he won their confidence, and to the discipline that ensued, together with the complete confidence placed in him by the management, he owed those numerous opportunities of producing the Savoy Operas in the days gone by exactly in the spirit in which they were written and composed. A few rehearsal incidents will best re-create the disciplinarian atmosphere of the Savoy stage under Gilbert's *régime*. A rehearsal of *The Mikado* was to all appearances progressing favourably when Gilbert suddenly called out, "There is a gentleman in the left group not holding his fan correctly," whereupon his second-in-command explained, "There is one gentleman who is absent through illness." "Ah!" replied Gilbert very gravely, "that is not the gentleman I am referring to." On another occasion arrangements were being made for the revival of *H.M.S.*

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MR. ALFRED CELLIER

MR. FRANCOIS CELLIER

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Pinafore, and Grossmith tells a story of the lady who had been selected to play the part of Josephine. She "objected to standing anywhere but in the centre of the stage," sweetly insinuating to the author that she was always acccustomed to enjoy the privileges of that position; said the gallant Gilbert to her in the most ingratiating tone: "Oh, but this is *not* Italian Opera; this is only a low burlesque of the worst possible kind." But there is a story concerning Grossmith which throws even more light on Gilbert, the autocratic stage-manager. It was the first night of *The Mikado;* Grossmith was singing "The flowers that bloom in the spring, tra la," when suddenly he stumbled and fell; he quickly picked himself up, the audience thoroughly enjoyed this unrehearsed effect, imagined it "had to do with the case" and Grossmith finished his duet with Nanki-Poo and made his exit. He did not hear the outburst of applause calling him back, his mind was too full of that fall; he made his way to Gilbert who was standing in the wings, and in great distress apologised for having lost his balance; "I am so sorry," he said, "I'm afraid I quite spoiled the song." "Not at all," replied Gilbert, quick to gauge the spontaneity of the laugh which greeted the tumble; "fall down in exactly the same way whenever you sing the song, but don't get up again till you've finished." And nightly after that Grossmith added to his quaint interpretation of this duet by slipping to the ground at the same point where he had involuntarily stumbled and fell on the first night, and to the added amusement of the audience he maintained a fantastic sitting posture till the end of the song.

Gilbert is one of the most capable stage-managers and producers that our theatre can boast. He is naturally endowed with the qualities of a ruler who can inspire discipline; and even now at the age of seventy this finely-built, erstwhile officer of the Gordon Highlanders, whose volunteer experience served him so well in drilling a stage crowd, walks into a

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room or on to the stage with the alert step and dignified carriage of a commander who charges his whole environment with power. Merely to see him is to be instinctively impelled mentally to stand at attention, but to know him is to realise that he is as just and generous as he is strong, and to feel that what the Stage has gained from Gilbert's *régime* the Army and the Bar have lost. Under that *régime* in the old days the Savoy Operas were not merely stage-managed by the author up to the last moment of the dress rehearsal as has been the case with the present revivals, but they were actually produced under his personal direction. Producing and stage-managing a play are two very different things, and although one man may double the parts of stage-manager and producer, and even play at the same time a third *rôle* as actor, yet whenever these various duties are consigned to separate officials the producer has the freest hand, the broadest scope, and the greatest authority amongst every one connected with the artistic side of the theatre. The producer is the author's representative responsible for seeing that a play is interpreted under conditions in which the whole is greater than the part, and for materialising the whole setting of the play in the artistic spirit in which scenery, dresses, and stage properties are outlined in the stage directions or suggested by the text of the play. The ideal producer must have the dramatic instinct, the artistic temperament, a keen imagination, a wide historical knowledge together with a sympathetic appreciation of the arts, crafts, customs, and general characteristics of various periods, a sufficient knowledge of stagecraft to enable him to obtain effects without a constant resource to the expensive luxury and undesirable blessing of blatant realism, and the strength of mind to insist on having a voice in the casting of any play that he takes the responsibility of producing. To these exacting qualifications he may or may not be able to add the ability to stage-manage, a task which

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MR. W. S. GILBERT LEAVING SAVOY THEATRE AFTER REHEARSAL, JANUARY 23RD, 1907
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demands from those who accept office an intelligent comprehension of plays, a detailed knowledge of stagecraft, a certain instinct for acting by which the purely imitative mime may be trained, the business instinct and the personal qualities of a disciplinarian. But the most competent stage-manager has to face the fact that his power is limited by the utmost possibilities of given material selected by a higher authority, whereas the producer is well-nigh a free agent, particularly if he enjoys the complete confidence of the management. Possibly he may have to keep his expenditure within a certain margin; but the artist generally manages to rise superior to money difficulties, and with *carte blanche* to present a play as he thinks it should be presented, and a voice in the casting of the play, the producer should be able to do the author full justice if he is fit to be placed in command of the artistic side of the theatre. In the old days Gilbert was both producer and stage-manager to the Savoy; he approved the cast he was to train, and enjoyed complete artistic and even financial freedom in the presentation of each successive Gilbert and Sullivan opera. The artistic quality of the performances which resulted will always be a Savoy tradition bearing testimony to his special qualifications for both positions. The present revivals mark the first occasion on which during his long connection with the Savoy he has not been called upon to fill the office of producer; and Savoy-lovers generally agree that these performances are not up to Gilbertian pitch, the while they agree that Mr. Workman is a Savoyard star, and that no playgoer should miss the opportunity of renewing or making the acquaintance of the Gilbert and Sullivan operas in their own home.

After the dress rehearsal Gilbert's work was practically finished; he only stage-managed his plays up to this point as a vital part of the actual artistic production of them for which he and Sullivan were jointly responsible. Then came the "first night," which Gilbert spent in the wings of

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the Savoy, always in that state of mind which may be briefly described as stage-writer's cramp. The affection is generally cured for the time being by a call such as rang through the Savoy on those first nights, but Gilbert's attacks must have been painfully severe, for he could never be induced to see through a complete public performance of any one of the Savoy Operas even when they had been hall-marked with success.

The call does not quite mark the last stage in the evolution of a Savoy Opera; the final touch was given behind the curtain, where a pleasing first-night custom, too spontaneous to be called a ceremony, was enacted; while the men of the cast expressed their congratulations and thanks to Gilbert and Sullivan, the gentler sex gave a very genuine ring to such words by claiming in turn the right to kiss the author. This custom was revived on the occasion of the recent production of *The Yeomen of the Guard*, when Jessie Bond, one of the many old Savoyards present, hastened behind the scenes at the close of the performance, and set the old-time example to the New Guard.

A review of Gilbert's libretti naturally falls under the headings of plots, scenes, characters, musical numbers and dialogue. In constructing his plots he worked on the theory that even if a whole play is nonsensical, the parts should be consistent, and given an illogical basis the treatment must still be logical. Many of his plots were suggested, as we have seen, by the "Bab Ballads." *The Yeomen of the Guard* was inspired by a Beefeater as the subject of an advertisement of the Tower Furnishing Company, which attracted his notice whilst he was waiting for a train at Uxbridge Station; *The Sorcerer* was founded on one of his own stories, which appeared in *The Graphic; The Mikado* was the result of a train of thought first set in action by a casual glance at a Japanese executioner's sword, which used to hang in his library; and *The Gondoliers* was suggested by a view of the Piazzetta at Venice. *Patience*

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according to popular belief was the outcome of an overwhelming desire on Gilbert's part to ridicule the æsthetic movement of the day as inspired by Oscar Wilde's cult of the beautiful; in the name of that cult to which the artistic world owes so much I rejoice to be able to point out that Gilbert had practically completed the scenario of *Patience* before he gave a thought to æstheticism. In the original plot all the æsthetes of the present version were curates! Gilbert started *Patience* with the idea of satirising the lesser dignitaries of the Church and their sighing admirers on the lines of "The Rival Curates" in the "Bab Ballads," but he was attacked by scruples, thought he might give offence, and looking round for a substitute for black cloth his eyes lit on the Liberty garb. There was at the time a small band of genuine æsthetes endeavouring to foster a love of the beautiful, a somewhat larger clique of spurious followers, and a vast majority of practical souls with early Victorian ideas on beauty and a strong tendency to ridicule the new movement. It was this majority that might have been particularly offended by the curates who originally figured in *Patience*, and for their conscience sake Gilbert made a sacrifice. By satirising the pretentious followers of the new cult he knew he would not hurt the feelings of the genuine æsthete, and would certainly provide a very palatable entertainment for the practical souls; but he also realised that he would have to pay the penalty of date-stamping his libretto by changing the curates into poets. *Patience* and *The Princess Ida* are the only Savoy Operas based on a passing phase; indeed, so alive is Gilbert to the fact that a play dealing with mere mannerisms becomes old-fashioned as those mannerisms inevitably die out, that not only did he usually choose plots that "age cannot wither," but he even carefully avoided in most of his libretti such topical allusions as fast changing custom quickly stales.

Gilbert, who has a keen sense of the beautiful, delighted

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in choosing a picturesque environment for his scenes; the Japanese setting of *The Mikado*, the Venetian surroundings of *The Gondoliers*, and the old Tower of London as the home of *The Yeomen of the Guard* are three notable examples amongst the many instances of an æsthetic taste which was always in evidence in the *mise-en-scène* of the Savoy operas.

Gilbert's characters—where *do* they come from, those grotesque personalities, which seem so familiar to everyone whilst no one can recall exactly how, when and where he has met them in the flesh? "I am the very pattern of a modern Major-Gineral," sings Major-General Stanley in *The Pirates of Penzance*, and he gives us an insight into the unique policy adopted by Gilbert in creating his characters; ordinary human beings would not suit his purpose, so forthwith he devised patterns of types such as combine all the characteristics of popular systems, theories and convictions; these army, navy, judicial, aristocratic, democratic and such-like patterns all act as if they were under the magic spell that enchanted *The Palace of Truth*, and by the guileless way in which they take themselves quite seriously they disclose the humorous elements in the systems with which they are identified. Gilbert had an abundance of raw material from which to create his pattern characters; his experiences in a Government office, in the Army and at the Bar offered boundless opportunities to his penetrating observation, and furthermore he was brought into contact with many naval men by a seafaring hobby which induced him to make himself acquainted with all the intricacies of a full-rigged ship, to study for a master mariner's certificate, and to build himself a 110-ton yacht in which he passed much of his spare time cruising about in home waters. Gilbert is indeed a living proof that the life of a rolling stone is the ideal life for a dramatist, who is always far better employed in collecting experiences than in gathering moss; an intimate

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acquaintance with many walks in life prevents the necessity for a monotonous repetition of types. Moreover, Gilbert has the necessary technical knowledge to enable his characters to be correct in details when they talk about peaceful and warfaring administration, consequently they never fall into traps such as are laid for unwary characters who have to glean an amateur knowledge of technicalities from bewildering encyclopædic tutors, who surely must have inspired the sage to prophesy that "two of a trade never agree."

When Gilbert's characters talk they keep brains and risible muscles in a constant state of activity. Frequently they are servants of the public, and so zealous and energetic are they that they do not even hesitate to impose on themselves the exacting duties of a combination of offices; to such lengths do they carry their disinterested labours that in Titipu the whole duties of the State are shared between Ko-Ko, Lord High Executioner, and Pooh-Bah, Lord High Everything Else. Who has not wept copiously for poor Pooh-Bah, First Lord of the Treasury, Lord Chief Justice, Commander-in-Chief, Lord High Admiral, Master of the Buckhounds, Groom of the Back Stairs, Archbishop of Titipu, and Lord Mayor, when he is placed in the awkward predicament of arranging the State celebrations in honour of Ko-Ko's wedding?

Ko-Ko. Pooh-Bah, it seems that the festivities in connection with my approaching marriage must last a week. I should like to do it handsomely, and I want to consult you as to the amount I ought to spend upon them.

Pooh-Bah. Certainly. In which of my capacities? As First Lord of the Treasury, Lord Chamberlain, Attorney-General, Chancellor of the Exchequer, Privy Purse, or Private Secretary?

Ko. Suppose we say as Private Secretary.

Pooh. Speaking as your Private Secretary, I should say that, as the city will have to pay for it, don't stint yourself, do it well.

Ko. Exactly—as the city will have to pay for it. That is your advice.

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Pooh. As Private Secretary. Of course, you will understand that, as Chancellor of the Exchequer, I am bound to see that due economy is observed.

Ko. Oh. But you said just now "Don't stint yourself, do it well."

Pooh. As Private Secretary.

Ko. And now you say that due economy must be observed.

Pooh. As Chancellor of the Exchequer.

Ko. I see. Come over here, where the Chancellor can't hear us. Now, as my Solicitor, how do you advise me to deal with this difficulty?

Pooh. Oh, as your Solicitor, I should have no hesitation in saying, "Chance it—"

Ko. Thank you. (*Shaking his hand*) I will.

Pooh. If it were not that, as Lord Chief Justice, I am bound to see that the law isn't violated.

Ko. I see. Come over here where the Chief Justice can't hear us. Now, then, as First Lord of the Treasury?

Pooh. Of course, as First Lord of the Treasury, I could propose a special vote that would cover all expenses, if it were not that, as leader of the Opposition, it would be my duty to resist it, tooth and nail. Or, as Paymaster-General, I could so cook the accounts, that as Lord High Auditor I should never discover the fraud. But then, as Archbishop of Titipu, it would be my duty to denounce my dishonesty and give myself into my own custody as First Commissioner of Police.

Ko. That's extremely awkward.

Pooh. I don't say that all these people couldn't be squared; but it is right to tell you that I shouldn't be sufficiently degraded in my own estimation unless I was insulted with a very considerable bribe.

Ko. The matter shall have my careful consideration.

Another very delightful trait in these characters is their love of equality. Whenever they discourse on the levelling theory they never speak slightingly of rank, they seem to thoroughly realise that exclusiveness is of the essence of snobbery in all classes of society, and they always manage to be true to their principles in a way that leaves no "probable, possible shadow of doubt" that they are human. For instance, we have those redoubtable champions of liberty, Marco and Giuseppe Palmieri in *The Gondoliers*, who suddenly find themselves called upon to jointly assume the reins of government in the Kingdom of Barataria; think

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MR. GEORGE GROSSMITH

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how ideally they reconcile what they want to do with what they think they ought to want to do.

Giuseppe. We are jolly gondoliers, the sons of Baptisto Palmieri, who led the last revolution. Republicans, heart and soul, we hold all men to be equal. As we abhor oppression, we abhor kings; as we detest vain-glory, we detest rank; as we despise effeminacy we despise wealth. We are Venetian gondoliers—your equals in everything except our calling, and in that at once your masters and your servants.

Don Alhambra del Bolero. Bless my heart, how unfortunate! One of you may be Baptisto's son, for anything I know to the contrary; but the other is no less a personage than the only son of the late King of Barataria.

All. What!

Don Al. And I trust—I *trust* it was that one who slapped me on the shoulder and called me his man.

Giu. One of us a king!
Marco. Not brothers!
Tessa. The King of Barataria!
Gianetta. Well, who'd have thought it! } *Together.*

Marco. But which is it?

Don Al. What does it matter? As you are both Republicans, and hold kings in abhorrence, of course you'll abdicate at once. (*Going.*)

Tes. and Gia. Oh, don't do that. (MARCO *and* GIUSEPPE *stop him.*)

Giu. Well, as to that, of course there are kings and kings. When I say that I detest kings, I mean I detest *bad* kings.

Don Al. I see. It's a delicate distinction.

Giu. Quite so. Now I can conceive a kind of king—an ideal king—the creature of my fancy, you know—who would be absolutely unobjectionable. A king, for instance, who would abolish taxes and make everything cheap, except gondolas.

Mar. And give a great many free entertainments to the gondoliers.

Giu. And let off fireworks on the Grand Canal, and engage all the gondolas for the occasion.

Mar. And scramble money on the Rialto among the gondoliers.

Giu. Such a king would be a blessing to his people, and if I were a king, that is the sort of king I would be.

Don Al. Come, I'm glad to find your objections are not insuperable.

Mar. and Giu. Oh, they're not insuperable.

Tes. and Gia. No, they're not insuperable.

Giu. Besides, we are open to conviction. Our views may

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have been hastily formed on insufficient grounds. They may be crude, ill-digested, erroneous. I've a very poor opinion of the politician who is not open to conviction!

Then, too, we have Alexis in *The Sorcerer*, burning to break down the artificial barriers of rank, wealth, education, age, beauty, habits, taste and temper, who has already "made some converts to the principle that men and women should be coupled in matrimony without distinction of rank." Speaking to Aline his betrothed on his pet project he says:

I have lectured on the subject at Mechanics' Institutes, and the mechanics were unanimous in favour of my views. I have preached in workhouses, beershops, and lunatic asylums, and I have been received with enthusiasm. I have addressed navvies on the advantages that would accrue to them if they married wealthy ladies of rank, and not a navvy dissented.

Aline. Noble fellows! And yet there are those who hold that the uneducated classes are not open to argument!

Then again there is Captain Corcoran, who attaches but little value to rank or wealth, but in a tender, fatherly way warns his daughter that "the line must be drawn somewhere" and he cannot quite see that the marriage of a captain's daughter with a humble sailor would make for happiness although it might make for ideals. In contrast to this situation we recall the scene in *Iolanthe* in which Lord Tolloller implores the "lowly-born" Phyllis to

Spurn not the nobly born
With love affected,
Nor treat with virtuous scorn
The well connected.
* * * * *
Hearts just as pure and fair
May beat in Belgrave Square
As in the lowly air
Of Seven Dials! *

Genuine Social Reformers are many of these characters; the trend of their views suggests a Social Aristocratic

* "The Bab Ballads and Songs of a Savoyard." Macmillan.

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Federation rather than a Democratic League, but it is evident that the leader of their progressive movement is an Anythingist, a looker-on in the social game who claims the right of independent thought and judgment.

It has already been suggested that Gilbert and Sullivan combined words and music in such a way as to make of them one Art; so essential are they to each other in Savoy Opera, that it frequently happens that when the words and the music are dissociated neither has exceptional value, whereas together they have uncommon merit. For this reason, some of Gilbert's lyrics have no appreciable literary value, although there are others which show that the art of tone-poetry does not necessarily involve poetic sacrifice, whilst Sullivan's music which is wedded to them proves a similar theory from the musician's point of view. But Savoy-lovers do not criticise libretti and music of Savoy Opera as two distinct things; they take them together, as Gilbert and Sullivan wrote them to be taken together, and they rejoice and are thankful. I recall these Operas with the object of trying to provide a short Savoy entertainment, and remind myself that I am not handicapped by my inability to provide an orchestra since Sullivan's music will surely be heard as Gilbert's lyrics are read by their joint admirers; here I am in a maze of delight; the air is charmed with melody, and at every turn I am accosted by a Savoy-lover singing, whistling or humming his favourite refrain, asking me to tell everybody else I meet that this or that is the best thing Gilbert and Sullivan ever wrote. Where am I to begin, where end, for if I recalled all the best things Gilbert and Sullivan ever wrote I should want much more space than I have been given for the whole of this little book. "When in doubt, be selfish," is the only motto I can coin to help me out of my difficulty, so I shall draw up a short programme of Savoy selections from my own best favourite numbers.

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CHORUS. (*The Sorcerer.*)

Now to the banquet we press;
Now for the eggs, the ham,
Now for the mustard and cress,
Now for the strawberry jam!
Now for the tea of our host,
Now for the rollicking bun,
Now for the muffin and toast
Now for the gay Sally Lunn!

TRIO. (*The Mikado.*)

YUM-YUM, PEEP-BO AND PITTI-SING.

The Three. Three little maids from school are we,
Pert as a schoolgirl well can be.
Filled to the brim with girlish glee,
Three little maids from school!

Yum-Yum. Everything is a source of fun.
Peep-Bo. Nobody's safe, for we care for none!
Pitti-Sing. Life is a joke that's just begun!
The Three. Three little maids from school!

All (*dancing*). Three little maids who, all unwary,
Come from a ladies' seminary,
Freed from its genius tutelary—
The Three (*suddenly demure*). Three little maids from school!

Yum-Yum. One little maid is a bride, Yum-Yum—
Peep-Bo. Two little maids in attendance come—
Pitti-Sing. Three little maids is the total sum.
The Three. Three little maids from school!

Yum-Yum. From three little maids take one away—
Peep-Bo. Two little maids remain, and they—
Pitti-Sing. Won't have to wait very long, they say. —
The Three. Three little maids from school!

All (*dancing*). Three little maids who, all unwary,
Come from a ladies' seminary,
Freed from its genius tutelary—
The Three (*suddenly demure*). Three little maids from school.

SONG. (*The Gondoliers.*)*

MARCO.

Take a pair of sparkling eyes,
Hidden, ever and anon,
In a merciful eclipse—
Do not heed their mild surprise—

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Having passed the Rubicon.
Take a pair of rosy lips;
Take a figure trimly planned—
Such as admiration whets
(Be particular in this);
Take a tender little hand,
Fringed with dainty fingerettes,
Press it—in parenthesis;—
Take all these, you lucky man—
Take and keep them, if you can!

Take a pretty little cot—
Quite a miniature affair—
Hung about with trellised vine,
Furnish it upon the spot
With the treasures rich and rare
I've endeavoured to define.
Live to love and love to live—
You will ripen at your ease,
Growing on the sunny side—
Fate has nothing more to give.
You're a dainty man to please
If you are not satisfied.
Take my counsel, happy man;
Act upon it, if you can!

BALLAD. (*The Sorcerer.*)*

DR. DALY.

Time was when Love and I were well acquainted.
Time was when we walked ever hand in hand,
A saintly youth, with worldly thought untainted—
None better loved than I in all the land!
Time was when maidens of the noblest station,
Forsaking even military men,
Would gaze upon me, rapt in adoration.
Ah me! I was a fair young curate then!

Had I a headache? sighed the maids assembled;
Had I a cold? welled forth the silent tear;
Did I look pale? then half a parish trembled;
And when I coughed all thought the end was near.
I had no care—no jealous doubts hung o'er me;
For I was loved beyond all other men.
Fled gilded dukes and belted earls before me.
Ah me! I was a pale young curate then!

* "The Bab Ballads and Songs of a Savoyard." Macmillan.

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SONG. (*Trial by Jury.*)*

JUDGE.

When I, good friends, was called to the Bar,
I'd an appetite fresh and hearty,
But I was, as many young barristers are,
An impecunious party:
I'd a swallow-tail coat of a beautiful blue—
A brief which I bought of a booby—
A couple of shirts and a collar or two,
And a ring that looked like a ruby!

In Westminster Hall I danced a dance,
Like a semi-despondent fury;
For I thought I should never hit on a chance
Of addressing a British jury—
But I soon got tired of third-class journeys,
And dinners of bread and water;
So I fell in love with a rich attorney's
Elderly, ugly daughter.

The rich attorney, he wiped his eyes,
And replied to my fond professions:
"You shall reap the reward of your enterprise,
At the Bailey and Middlesex Sessions.
You'll soon get used to her looks," said he,
"And a very nice girl you'll find her!
She may very well pass for forty-three
In the dusk, with a light behind her!"

The rich attorney was good as his word:
The briefs came trooping gaily,
And every day my voice was heard
At the Sessions or Ancient Bailey.
All thieves who could my fees afford
Relied on my orations,
And many a burglar I've restored
To his friends and his relations.

At length I became as rich as the Gurneys—
An incubus then I thought her,
So I threw over that rich attorney's
Elderly, ugly daughter.
The rich attorney my character high
Tried vainly to disparage—
And now, if you please, I'm ready to try
This Breach of Promise of Marriage!

* "The Bab Ballads and Songs of a Savoyard." Macmillan.

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DUET. (*The Mikado.*)

NANKI-POO AND KO-KO.

Nanki. The flowers that bloom in the spring,
Tra la,
Breathe promise of merry sunshine—
As we merrily dance and we sing,
Tra la,
We welcome the hope that they bring.
Tra la,
Of a summer of roses and wine;
And that's what we mean when we say that a thing
Is welcome as flowers that bloom in the spring.
Tra la la la la la, &c.

Ko-Ko. The flowers that bloom in the spring,
Tra la,
Have nothing to do with the case.
I've got to take under my wing,
Tra la,
A most unattractive old thing
Tra la,
With a caricature of a face;
And that's what I mean when I say, or I sing,
"Oh bother the flowers that bloom in the spring!"
Tra la la la la la, &c.

SONG. (*The Pirates of Penzance.*)*

SERGEANT.

Sergeant. When a felon's not engaged in his employment—
All. His employment,
Serg. Or maturing his felonious little plans—
All. Little plans,
Serg. His capacity for innocent enjoyment—
All. 'Cent enjoyment—
Serg. Is just as great as any honest man's—
All. Honest man's.
Serg. Our feelings we with difficulty smother—
All. 'Culty smother.
Serg. When constabulary duty's to be done—
All. To be done,
Serg. Ah, take one consideration with another—
All. With another,
Serg. A policeman's lot is not a happy one.
All. When constabulary duty's to be done,
The policeman's lot is not a happy one.

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* "The Bab Ballads and Songs of a Savoyard." Macmillan.

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Serg. When the enterprising burglar's not a-burgling—
All. Not a-burgling,
Serg. When the cut-throat isn't occupied in crime—
All. 'Pied in crime,
Serg. He loves to hear the little brook a-gurgling—
All. Brook a-gurgling,
Serg. And listen to the merry village chime—
All. Village chime.
Serg. When the coster's finished jumping on his mother—
All. On his mother,
Serg. He loves to lie a-basking in the sun—
All. In the sun.
Serg. Ah, take one consideration with another—
All. With another,
Serg. The policeman's lot is not a happy one.
All. When constabulary duty's to be done—
To be done,
The policeman's lot is not a happy one—
Happy one.

DUET. (*The Yeomen of the Guard.*)*

POINT AND ELSIE.

Point. I have a song to sing, O!
Elsie. Sing me your song, O!
Point. It is sung to the moon
By a love-lorn loon,
Who fled from the mocking throng, O!
It's the song of a merryman, moping mum,
Whose soul was sad, and whose glance was glum
Who sipped no sup, and who craved no crumb,
As he sighed for the love of a ladye!
Heighdy! heighdy!
Misery me, lackadaydee!
He sipped no sup, and he craved no crumb,
As he sighed for the love of a ladye.

Elsie. I have a song to sing, O!
Point. Sing me your song, O!
Elsie. It is sung with the ring
Of the songs maids sing
Who love with a love life-long, O!
It's the song of a merrymaid, peerly proud
Who loved a lord, and who laughed aloud
At the moan of the merryman, moping mum,
Whose soul was sore, whose glance was glum,
Who sipped no sup, and who craved no crumb,
As he sighed for the love of a ladye!

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Heighdy! heighdy!
Misery me, lackadaydee!
He sipped no sup, and he craved no crumb,
As he sighed for the love of a ladye.

Point. I have a song to sing, O!
Elsie. Sing me your song, O!
Point. It is sung to the knell
Of a churchyard bell,
And a doleful dirge, ding dong, O!
It's a song of a popinjay, bravely born,
Who turned up his noble nose with scorn
At the humble merrymaid, peerly proud,
Who loved that lord, and who laughed aloud
At the moan of the merryman, moping mum,
Whose soul was sad, whose glance was glum,
Who sipped no sup, and who craved no crumb,
As he sighed for the love of a ladye!
Both. Heighdy! heighdy!
Misery me, lackadaydee!
He sipped no sup, and he craved no crumb,
As he sighed for the love of a ladye.

Elsie. I have a song to sing, O!
Point. Sing me your song, O!
Elsie. It is sung with a sigh
And a tear in the eye,
For it tells of a righted wrong, O!
It's a song of a merrymaid, once so gay,
Who turned on her heel and tripped away
From the peacock popinjay, bravely born,
Who turned up his noble nose with scorn
At the humble heart that he did not prize:
So she begged on her knees, with downcast eyes,
For the love of the merryman, moping mum,
Whose soul was sad and whose glance was glum,
Who sipped no sup, and who craved no crumb,
As he sighed for the love of a ladye!
Both. Heighdy! heighdy!
Misery me, lackadaydee!
His pains were o'er, and he sighed no more,
For he lived in the love of a ladye!

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SONG. (*The Mikado.*)

NANKI-POO.

A wandering minstrel I—
A thing of shreds and patches,
Of ballads, songs and snatches,
A dreamy lullaby!

My catalogue is long,
Through every passion ranging,
And to your humours changing
I tune my supple song!

Are you in sentimental mood?
I'll sing with you,
Oh, willow, willow!
On maiden's coldness do you brood?
I'll do so too—
Oh, willow, willow!
I'll charm your willing ears
With songs of lover's fears,
While sympathetic tears
My cheeks bedew—
Oh, willow, willow!

But if patriotic sentiment is wanted,
I've patriotic ballads cut and dried;
For where'er our country's banner may be planted,
All other local banners are defied!
Our warriors, in serried ranks assembled,
Never quail—or they conceal it if they do—
And I shouldn't be surprised if nations trembled
Before the mighty troops of Titipu!

And if you call for a song of the sea,
We'll heave the capstan round,
With a yeo heave ho, for the wind is free,
Her anchor's a-trip and her helm's a-lee,
Hurrah for the homeward bound!
Yeo-ho—heave ho—
Hurrah for the homeward bound!

To lay aloft in a howling breeze
May tickle a landsman's taste;
But the happiest hours a sailor sees
Is when he's down
At an inland town,
With his Nancy on his knees, yeo ho!
And his arm around her waist!

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SCENE FROM "THE MIKADO"
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Then man the capstan—off we go,
As the fiddler swings us round,
With a yeo heave ho,
And a rumbelow,
Hurrah for the homeward bound!

A wandering minstrel I, &c.

SELECTION. (*H.M.S. Pinafore.*)*

He is an Englishman!
For he himself has said it,
And it's greatly to his credit,
That he is an Englishman!

For he might have been a Roosian,
A French, or Turk, or Proosian,
Or perhaps Itali-an!

But in spite of all temptations
To belong to other nations,
He remains an Englishman!
Hurrah!
For the true-born Englishman!

* "The Bab Ballads and Songs of a Savoyard." Macmillan.

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THE GILBERT AND SULLIVAN OPERAS

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PRODUCED AT THE ROYALTY THEATRE.

	Produced	Withdrawn	Performances
Trial by Jury	Mar. 25, 1875	Dec. 18, 1875 (Including summer break from June 13 to Oct. 11.)	

PRODUCED AT THE OPÉRA COMIQUE.

The Sorcerer	Nov. 17, 1877	May 22, 1878	175
H.M.S. Pinafore	May 25, 1878	Feb. 20, 1880	700
H.M.S. Pinafore (children)	Dec. 16, 1879	Mar. 20, 1880	
The Pirates of Penzance	April 3, 1880	April 2, 1881	633
Patience	April 23, 1881	Oct. 8, 1881	170

PRODUCED AT THE SAVOY.

Patience (transferred from Opéra Comique)	Oct. 10, 1881	Nov. 22, 1882	408
Iolanthe	Nov. 25, 1882	Jan. 1, 1884	398
Princess Ida	Jan. 5, 1884	Oct. 9, 1884	246
The Sorcerer (first revival) and *Trial by Jury*	Oct. 11, 1884	Mar. 12, 1885	150
The Pirates of Penzance (children's matinées)	Dec. 26, 1884	Feb. 13, 1885	36
The Mikado	Mar. 14, 1885	Jan. 19, 1887	672
Ruddigore	Jan. 22, 1887	Nov. 5, 1887	288

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	Produced	Withdrawn	Performances
H.M.S. Pinafore (first revival)	Nov. 12, 1887	Mar. 10, 1888	120
The Pirates of Penzance (first revival)	Mar. 17, 1888	June 6, 1888	80
The Mikado (first revival)	June 7, 1888	Sept. 29, 1888	116
The Yeomen of the Guard	Oct. 3, 1888	Nov. 30, 1889	423
The Gondoliers	Dec. 7, 1889	June 20, 1891	554
Utopia, Limited	Oct. 7, 1893	June 9, 1894	245
The Mikado (second revival)	Nov. 6, 1895	Mar. 4, 1896	127
The Grand Duke	Mar. 7, 1896	July 10, 1896	123
The Mikado (matinées)	May, June, July, 1896		
The Mikado (third revival)	July 11, 1896	Feb. 17, 1897	229
The Yeomen of the Guard (first revival)	May 5, 1897	Nov. 20, 1897	186
The Gondoliers (first revival)	Mar. 22, 1898	May 21, 1898	62
The Gondoliers (second revival)	July 18, 1898	Sept. 17, 1898	63
The Sorcerer (second revival) and *Trial by Jury*	Sept. 22, 1898	Dec. 31, 1898	102
H.M.S. Pinafore (second revival)	June 6, 1899	Nov. 25, 1899	174
The Pirates of Penzance (second revival)	June 30, 1900	Nov. 3, 1900	127
Patience (first revival)	Nov. 7, 1900	April 20, 1901	150
The Yeomen of the Guard (second revival)	Dec. 8, 1906		
The Gondoliers (third revival)	Jan. 22, 1907		

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CHAPTER VI

THE NATIONAL DEBT TO W. S. GILBERT

My first instinct is to rejoice that Gilbert is an Englishman, but at the mere thought of chronicling a grateful nation's thanks the patriotic air is rent by snatches of that refrain

> He might have been a Roosian,
> A French, or Turk, or Proosian,
> Or perhaps Itali-an.

Consequently I am constrained to admit that he might well have been of some other nationality, since Savoy Opera in many other languages, and in almost every civilised country except France, has proved as popular as in its native setting. As a merry-maker Gilbert is practically speaking a cosmopolitan, and England may well be proud that he has contributed in her name to the common fund of intellectual laughter. Many a cosmopolitan has been able to make the world think and sigh, but few have been born with the great gift of making the world think and laugh, and to this little handful of rare Universals the British Isles, the commercial, uncultured British Isles have contributed two of the finest intellectual wits—William Schwenck Gilbert and George Bernard Shaw, both of whom have elected to write for the stage. Is it not nearly time that we were recognised in the theatrical world as something more than a nation of shopkeepers who by accident once produced Shakespeare, or is it always to be a case of give a dog a bad name?

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Not for one moment do I wish to claim that Gilbert is a great artist, any more than I should seek to place Bernard Shaw on that particular pedestal—I speak, of course, in a wholly unprophetic strain of the spontaneous, un-Archerised Shaw. It is generally admitted, with or without reservation, that art is a presentment "of life seen through temperament," and temperament is the result of all the physical, psychological and psychical influences which may affect a human being. Gilbert's artistic temperament is certainly felt in some of his poetry, but that temperament was subdued in his best work by an intellect that was strong enough to gain the mastery over other qualities and hold them in subjection. A similar autocratic intellect has stood between Bernard Shaw and Art up to the present time, but Gilbert is Gilbert and Shaw is Shaw, praise be to intellect; together they are two of our greatest men whose names are associated with the drama, and they have both played leading parts in arousing intellectual laughter within the walls of our theatres. The one makes us think to laugh and the other makes us laugh to think, but not merely because we find intellect and humour combined in the Savoy libretti and Plays, Pleasant and Unpleasant, do I couple the names of Gilbert and Shaw in claiming that the nation owes a debt of gratitude to intellect for having foreshadowed that the theatre is the medium *par excellence* for circulating and stimulating ideas. They are strangely alike, these two intellectual wits; both are really serious men who have created a theatrical public by forestalling and catering for the much-maligned public taste, which is a very different thing from pandering to public appetite; both have an original appreciation of Shakespeare and both use strikingly similar methods while indulging their sense of humour.

Gilbert parodied *The Wicked World* in *The Happy Land*, Bernard Shaw parodied *Candida* in *How He Lied to Her Husband;* certainly the motives for these sportive jokes were different, but the spirit of the fun is the same. "I

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am a disciple of Bernard Shaw," says Dubedat in *The Doctor's Dilemma*, when his morals do not give satisfaction; "I can hum a fugue of which I've heard the music's din afore, And whistle all the airs from that infernal nonsense, *Pinafore*," exclaims the modern major-general whilst he is relating his qualifications for the post. Again, to realise that poor Punch's puppet-show had already suffered considerably from the onslaughts of the Savoy Superpunch before contemporary dramatic history inspired J. M. Barrie's one-act compliment to ideas in general and Shaw in particular, is to be reminded that there are two brothers Superpunch, both so overflowing with ideas that they are very justly accused of making their characters talk Gilbert and Shaw respectively; on artistic grounds this is, of course, indefensible, but we should surely remember that seeing we demand ideas in our plays, the dramatist would be somewhat too limited at present in his choice of characters if he were bound to make them all speak naturally! Gilbert has created and Shaw is creating thinking folk, from amongst whom the dramatist of the day after to-morrow will be able to make a good selection of characters who will be intellectually interesting and at the same time amusing if they are selected by an artist who can trick us into feeling that his characters talk naturally on the stage. Meanwhile, do we not owe a deep debt of gratitude to the characters who now talk Gilbert and Shaw respectively? They are so suggestive, so stimulating, and, above all, we never feel that they have offered up their sense of humour as a sacrifice to their intellect; consequently they never bore us as we are frequently bored by the worthily sensible and pathetically funny people we meet in real life. As the two great exponents of the new Drama of Ideas, Gilbert and Shaw may be accused of creating unnatural characters, but their defence is a strong one. Granted that Art alone can get to the heart of Nature, yet Intellect can probe much deeper than that

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THE O.P. CLUB
SAVOYARD CELEBRATION DINNER

Guest of the Evening, MR. W. S. GILBERT

The President, MR. SIDNEY DARK, *in the Chair*

Sunday, December 30, 1906, Hotel Cecil, Strand, W.C.

TOAST LIST AND PROGRAMME

Toast — **The King**

THE PRESIDENT

Toast — **The Savoy Opera**

THE PRESIDENT — Mr. W. S. GILBERT

SONG . . . . "I can't think why" . . . *Princess Ida*
Mr. C. HERBERT WORKMAN

SONG . . "Kind Sir, you cannot have the heart" *The Gondoliers*
Miss LILIAN COOMBER

SONG . . . "Ida was a twelvemonth old" . . *Princess Ida*
Mr. ROBERT EVETT

Toast — **The Savoyards**

Mr. T. MCDONALD RENDLE — Miss ROSINA BRANDRAM
Mr. GEORGE GROSSMITH

QUARTETTE . "Brightly dawns our Wedding Day" . *The Mikado*
Miss AGNES FRASER, Miss JESSIE ROSE,
Mr. SCOTT RUSSELL, and Mr. RICHARD TEMPLE

SONG . . . "A pair of sparkling eyes" . *The Gondoliers*
Mr. COURTICE POUNDS

SONG . . . . "The Moon and I" . . . *The Mikado*
Miss ISABEL JAY

Toast — **The Savoy Lovers**

Mr. RUTLAND BARRINGTON — Mr. CARL HENTSCHEL

SONG . . . . "The Vicar's Song" . . . *The Sorcerer*
Mr. RUTLAND BARRINGTON

SONG . . "The Lord Chancellor's Dream" . . *Iolanthe*
Mr. WALTER PASSMORE

Accompanist - Mr. Sinclair Mantell

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SAVOYARDS PRESENT AT THE DINNER

Mr. W. S. GILBERT

Miss Leonora Braham
Miss Jessie Bond
Miss Lilian Coomber
Miss Fortescue
Miss Agnes Fraser
Miss Julia Gwynne
Miss Sybil Grey
Miss Henri
Miss Isabel Jay
Miss Nancy McIntosh
Miss Decima Moore
Miss Louie Pounds
Miss Jessie Rose
Miss Geraldine Ulmar
Miss Ruth Vincent

Mr. Rutland Barrington
Mr. François Cellier

Mr. J. H. Clulow
Mr. Robert Evett
Mr. George Grossmith
Mr. Richard Green
Mr. John Le Hay
Mr. Durward Lely
Mr. Henry Lytton
Sir George Power, Bart.
Mr. Courtice Pounds.
Mr. Walter Passmore
Mr. Powis Pinder
Mr. Pacie Ripple
Mr. Scott Russell
Mr. W. R. Shirley
Mr. Richard Temple
Mr. Frank Thornton
Mr. Frank Wyatt
Mr. C. Herbert Workman

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Realism which is concerned with the superficial rather than with the essential. Having shown that in evolving the new Drama of Ideas England and Ireland have at least one idea in common, I must pass on to record further items on the credit side of Gilbert's account.

Gilbert has proved beyond all dispute that the theatre can provide suitable entertainment for happy family parties without being turned into a parish hall. Personally, I am of those who maintain that it is impossible for Art to be immoral; but whilst I want to see every theatre free to produce any play dealing with any subject, provided it could pass a censor whose sole duty it should be to suppress ribald vulgarity, I should like to see some theatres voluntarily and exclusively devoted to family-party entertainment, as was the Savoy in the Gilbert and Sullivan days. As things are at present, the lover of the drama is constantly being sacrificed for the sake of the young person, whilst parents, who wax indignant on the subject of "indecent and immoral plays," take their children indiscriminately and indiscreetly to see any licensed entertainment. I hope I have made it quite clear that I am no Puritan when I say that we owe our thanks to Gilbert for proving that the theatre can cater for the family without having recourse to a milk-and-water diet.

Thankful, too, should we be that one of the traditions of the Savoy is a highly respectable reputation, because in weaving that tradition Gilbert and Sullivan attracted many people to their dramatic home who had never before set foot in a theatre; when they found that the Savoy was not at all like what they had imagined a theatre to be—it is difficult to imagine what people who never go to the theatre do imagine—they ventured to cross the threshold of other playhouses, and the drama began to be discussed in circles where previously the mere mention of the word "stage" was a sin. Puritanism receives its first blow in any house when the word "stage" is taken off the con-

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versational *index expurgatorius*, and many is the blow which Gilbert has thus struck at that deadly enemy of the drama by the methods which have made Savoy Opera popular with an intelligent public, and won for him a place of honour amongst the intellectual stars of the stage.

At the age of seventy Gilbert, the doyen of our dramatists is a modern, and a modern he will still remain when the Savoy Operas are reproduced in the days to come as nineteenth-century classics, for his delightful nonsense always has that delicacy of touch which ensures everlasting freshness. Moreover, he levels his intellectual sallies at the fundamental principles of the social system and the inherent weaknesses of human nature; such primary causes are so slowly changed that their effects vary almost imperceptibly, and whilst generation after generation swarm round the banner of Progress and choose either the implements of War or the peaceful weapons of Science and Art to fight against these causes, generation after generation armed with a sense of humour can appreciate the absurdities of their effects. By the intelligently entertaining, broad-minded and comprehensive way in which Gilbert has drawn attention to vital absurdities he becomes a public benefactor, for the man who can make the world laugh whilst it thinks, holds Progress in the balance by checking the ravages of serious fanaticism.

It is one of the privileges of a Nation to be able to reward the public benefactors it produces, and the British lover of the Drama, optimistically rejoicing over its Sir Henry Irving and its Sir Charles Wyndham, is eagerly awaiting the day when England will claim that privilege in connection with a British dramatist. Meanwhile the people's love can alone twine the laurel-wreath for the British people's playwright, whilst a few playgoing enthusiasts may be found amongst those who favour the scheme for placing tablets on the homes of famous men. The house where Gilbert was born has been pulled down, so let

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me bring to a conclusion my estimate of the national debt to W. S. Gilbert by telling a story in the name of every Savoy-Lover.

Soon after Sir Luke Fildes had been rewarded by a grateful country for his services to Art, Gilbert met him at a social gathering and congratulated him on his new honours. In the course of conversation Sir Luke reminded Gilbert that the Dairy Maid "Patience" had been made up to exactly resemble the subject of his first successful picture, *Where are you going to, my pretty maid?* "Yes, I remember borrowing the idea for my milkmaid's costume from your picture," replied Gilbert, "but I have repaid that debt long ago by being the responsible cause of your new title."

"Responsible for my new title, how do you make that out?" asked the puzzled Sir Luke.

"Oh, it's easily explained," answered Gilbert. "Didn't I write in *Utopia:*

"Who knows but we may count among our intellectual chickens
Like you, an Earl of Thackeray and p'r'aps a Duke of Dickens—
Lord Fildes and Viscount Millais (when they come) we'll welcome sweetly—
In short, this happy country has been Anglicised completely!"

"Well, your prophecy is certainly a pattern of modified accuracy," exclaimed Sir Luke, "I would like to be similarly accurate in your case."

In Savoy Opera Gilbert will live amongst the Immortals, but he will also be handed down to posterity in that fascinating new history of Modern Britain which has yet to be written. It will be the delightful task of some historian in the future to hand down the times in which we live as the Age of Ideas, and of all the interesting upheavals that will have to be dealt with in connection with this Age, none will exceed in interest the Dramatic Revolution which is now in progress. Amongst the

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authors, managers, critics and societies who will be revered as pioneers of that Revolution, Gilbert will have a place of honour as the Public Exploder who leads the dance of the Flowers of Progress on the ruins of decadent perfection, the while he lays a powder mine of intellectual merriment under the foundation of multitudinous Utopias. In the interests of everyone's Utopia someone's ideas must be exploded, but since Universal Peace is fast becoming a universal ideal, let us hope that the office of Public Exploder will always be filled by someone who inherits Gilbert's sense of humour, and his power of proving that laughter, as a prime factor of the sporting instinct, is a far more fearsome explosive than dynamite or even tears.

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THE PLAYS OF W. S. GILBERT

A Bibliography by J. M. BULLOCH.

1866	*Dulcamara* (burlesque)	St. James's
	Allow Me to Explain (farce)	Prince of Wales's
	Highly Improbable (farce)	Royalty
1867	*La Vivandière* (burlesque)	Queen's
	Harlequin Cock Robin (pantomime)	Lyceum
1868	*The Merry Zingara* (burlesque)	Royalty
	No Cards (operetta)	Gallery of Illustration
1869	*Robert the Devil* (burlesque)	Gaiety
	Our Island Home (operetta)	Gallery of Illustration
1870	*An Old Score* (comedy)	Gaiety
	The Pretty Druidess (burlesque)	Charing Cross
	The Princess (extravaganza)	Olympic
	The Palace of Truth (comedy)	Haymarket
1871	*The Gentleman in Black* (comic opera)	Charing Cross Theatre
	Ages Ago (operetta)	Gallery of Illustration
	Pygmalion and Galatea (comedy)	Haymarket
1872	*Randall's Thumb* (comedy)	Court
	Creatures of Impulse	Court
	A Sensation Novel (operetta)	Gallery of Illustration
	Happy Arcadia (operetta)	Gallery of Illustration
1873	*The Wicked World* (comedy)	Haymarket
	The Happy Land (extravaganza)	Court (part author)
	On Guard (comedy)	Court
1874	*On Bail* (comedy)	Olympic
	Great Expectations (drama)	Court
	Topsy-Turvydom (extravaganza)	Criterion
	Charity (comedy)	Haymarket
	Dan'l Druce (drama)	Haymarket

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1875	*Ought We to Visit Her?* (comedy)	Royalty
	King Candules (farce)	Royalty
	The Wedding March (comedy)	Royalty
	Trial by Jury (operetta)	Royalty
	Tom Cobb (comedy)	St. James's
	Broken Hearts (comedy)	Court
	Thespis (comic opera)	Gaiety
1876	*Princess Toto* (opera)	Strand
1877	*The Sorcerer* (opera)	Opéra Comique
	Sweethearts (comedietta)	Prince of Wales's
	Engaged (comedy)	Haymarket
1878	*H.M.S. Pinafore* (opera)	Opéra Comique
	Committed for Trial (comedy)	Criterion
	The Ne'er-do-Weel (comedy)	Olympic
	Foggerty's Fairy (comedy)	Criterion
1879	*Gretchen* (drama)	Olympic
1880	*The Pirates of Penzance* (opera)	Opéra Comique
1881	*Patience* (opera)	Opéra Comique
1882	*Iolanthe* (opera)	Savoy
1883	*Eyes and No Eyes* (operetta)	Gallery of Illustration
	Comedy and Tragedy (comedy)	Lyceum
1884	*Princess Ida* (opera)	Savoy
1885	*The Mikado* (opera)	Savoy
1887	*Ruddigore* (opera)	Savoy
1888	*The Yeomen of the Guard* (opera)	Savoy
	Brantinghame Hall (comedy)	St. James's
1889	*The Gondoliers* (opera)	Savoy
1890	*Haste the Wedding* (operetta)	Criterion
1891	*Rosencrantz and Guildenstern* (comic drama)	Court
1892	*The Mountebanks* (opera)	Lyric
1893	*Utopia, Limited* (opera)	Savoy
1894	*His Excellency* (opera)	Lyric
1896	*The Grand Duke* (opera)	Savoy
1897	*The Fortune Hunter* (comedy)	Birmingham
1904	*Harlequin and the Fairy's Dilemma*	Garrick

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